PRUDENT PRISCILLA

By MARY C. E. WEMYSS

REFERENCE LIBRARY * HOUGHTON MIFFLIN CO. * BOSTON, MASS.
Archive
Collection

This book may not leave the Office
and if borrowed must be returned within 7 days

By Mary C. E. Wemyss

PRUDENT PRISCILLA.
PEOPLE OF POPHAM. Illustrated.
THE PROFESSIONAL AUNT.

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
BOSTON AND NEW YORK

PRUDENT PRISCILLA

Prudent Priscilla

BY

MARY C. E. WEMYSS

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
The Riverside Press Cambridge
1912

COPYRIGHT, 1912, MARY C. E. WEMYSS

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Published October 1912

PRUDENT PRISCILLA

Prudent Priscilla

I

I AM married. My husband's name is Richard Jerrold. I call him neither Richard as I ought, nor Dick as I might, but Christopher, because it is the name I like best. I always meant to marry a Christopher, and as a child I remembered such a one in my prayers and in my dreams he had a particular place.

When I met Richard I naturally did not allow the difference in a name to stand in the way of an assured happiness, and he, in saying I might call him anything in the world I liked, met and overcame a difficulty both to my satisfaction and to his indifference.

Should anything in the way of a legal difficulty ever arise between us, I should, of course, speak of Christopher as Richard, since it is customary in matters legal to call things by names the least familiar; obscurity lending dignity to the law.

Adela, my eldest sister, used to say I should marry a widower with a hair watch-chain. She was wrong; but the fear that she might not be was with me for some years.

After our father and mother died, we, my brothers and sisters and I, lived with Aunt Jolly. We called her Aunt Jolly for obvious reasons; most obvious to those who know her least.

Bobbie used to say, "Anyhow she 's jolly decent if she is n't the other sort of jolly."

By that he probably meant that she was n't cheerful, but she was, in a way, though slow to see a joke.

She used to say, "It is certainly an amusing story, dear, but not one you can tell."

There were so many stories that according to Aunt Jolly we could n't tell. So many subjects we could n't mention.

Christopher says Aunt Jolly is too absurd. That it is ridiculous not to mention a hippopotamus before Mr. Brown because they happen, both in their own way, to be plain; or Coutts's Bank before a bald-headed man.

Christopher may be right. It is, of course, a matter of up-bringing.

Among people there are those who see and like the "asparagus story," and those who don't see it and dislike it. Aunt Jolly says we must not, in any case, give it as a test, because to do so would argue a lack of good taste and breeding and would look as if we thought our sense of humour superior to that of others.

Aunt Jolly is right. There is nothing people resent more than the quality, or quantity even, of that particular sense being questioned. They have no such delicacy of feeling regarding their other senses — unless it be that of smell. Common sense they would prefer to have denied them.

Aunt Jolly is very particular too about dreams. She says, in the first place, to talk of dreams suggests a state of déshabille in which no gentlewoman would wish others to picture her.

Particularly does she dislike my banana dream, which was that I addressed a meeting on behalf of a society in which I was interested and made the following speech: "Ladies and Gentlemen, there is a crying need for the organisation of labour bureaux to meet the demands of that vast multitude of unemployed bananas, who are mostly widows with jaundice."

Aunt Jolly said if I told that dream there would certainly be present a widow and possibly she might have jaundice. It was true I might discover in time if she had, as the symptoms were unmistakeable; but in every other respect there was nothing so deceptive as widows.

Christopher did n't think the banana dream funny until he came face to face with a barrow of bananas in London. On the other hand, Aunt Jolly allowed, from the first, that probably it would appear funny to those who were easily amused. I told her it was at least interesting from the subconscious-mind point of view, and she said we had quite enough to do with the ordering of our conscious minds; that we must leave our unconscious minds to the guidance of a Higher thought.

Uncle Jim gave Aunt Jolly a brooch consisting of the words "Cheer Up" in gold letters. She wore it from a sense of duty because Uncle Jim limped with his left leg. She suffered under it — the brooch — because, she said, people smiled at her in buses on those very rare occasions when she travelled in one.

Aunt Jolly never takes smiles quite as they are meant. She is apt to find them critical, condemnatory, or amused.

"I don't look odd, dear, do I?" she says.

No one could possibly say Aunt Jolly looks odd, because there are hundreds just like her. That there should be hundreds just like her perhaps is odd. But there is, I suppose, the demand.

While there are children, there must be aunts. While there are fatherless and motherless children, still more must there be aunts. If only they were all like Aunt Jolly! On second thoughts, no! Fathers and mothers might too willingly lay down the burden of a lonely life and seek rest with the one who has gone before, if they could be certain the burden would be borne — not perhaps cheerfully — but gladly by Aunt Jollys.

Bobbie used to say — only when he wanted to cry comfortably — that he wished Aunt Jolly were fatter. And when she said, "Oh, Bobbie!" he said, "It's only because of the hard little bar just where my head rests; but it does n't matter, thank you."

When Aunt Jolly said mothers might be thin, Bobbie said, "I wonder!" And Aunt Jolly had a list of thin mothers made out in no time — the village boasted several — and put it beside Bobbie's bed, in fact on the top of his mug of milk so that it should n't escape him. The youngest member of a family is hard to convince. His is the accumulated experience of his elders and inferiors.

In this particular case he probably thought the paper was put there by Aunt Jolly because of her maidenly fear and innate detestation of earwigs.

So far as this story goes I have been perfectly lucid.

I have clearly said that until I married I and my brothers and sisters lived in a country village with Aunt Jolly.

That my father and mother died when Bobbie was a baby, one because the other did. That they left us and the house, and what Aunt Jolly called "an adequate income," to the said Aunt Jolly, spinster. Spinster through no fault of her own, but from deliberate choice and natural inclination. Just as there are born mothers so are there born aunts.

That Lady Ventnor was our nearest neighbour, also the richest, the most influential, and the kindest.

The first I heard of my magnetic smile was from Lady Ventnor.

She was in her garden cutting roses. As she laid the blooms one by one in the basket I held, she talked of the gift of understanding which was denied to most mortals, but which if possessed by one would make the whole world — if not kind — at least kinder.

I said, did n't some people possess it? And she said I must struggle against being matter of fact; there was nothing men disliked more.

Anxious not to appear more of a social success than I really was, I said men did n't come much to see us — I meant Aunt Jolly — and she said, "More fools they." I don't know whether I smiled then and if I did whether it held within its radiance that quality which Lady Ventnor chose to find magnetic, for she said nothing about my smile then. She went on talking of understanding, becoming as she proceeded a little involved.

Every now and then I nodded my head as much as to say that I, at all events, understood her and found the world wonderfully kind. As she laid the last rose in the basket, I said, as was expected of me, that she of all people I knew was the most understanding.

"Don't talk nonsense, my child, you are trying to flatter an old woman and the old woman is ashamed to discover how easy a thing it is to do. Young people perhaps don't know that the smallest attention paid by anyone under twenty to anyone over sixty is a tribute —"

I assured her I meant it, that of all the people I knew I found her the kindest, the gentlest, and the most tolerant, which summed up makes understanding or goes a long way towards it.

"How many people do you know?" she asked.

"D' you mean of every sort?" I said.

"There should be from your point of view only two kinds," she said, "good and bad. Begin with the bad. They are unquestionably the most interesting."

I blushed. "I don't think Mr. Jones is very good," I said hesitatingly. The form his wickedness took was necessarily nebulous. Aunt Jolly had seen to that.

"Why do you know him, then?"

I told Lady Ventnor that by being kind to him I hoped to do him good.

"You are a quaint person, Priscilla. Do you always bow with intent to do good? Are you doing me good now?"

I said, "How could I?"

She laughed. "It would be an undertaking, would n't it?"

She had misunderstood me. I told her so and she laughed.

She sat down on the garden seat and invited me with the end of her spud to sit beside her. "It is n't given to everyone, my child, in this life to do great things, but

the most unimportant woman in the world can smile if she tries — the less effort the better of course. There is nothing medicinally so valuable as a smile. The good it can do is incalculable."

I reminded her, belonging as I did to a large family, of the aggravating smile, the superior smile, and the numerous kinds of smiles used as weapons of annoyance by those born with aggravating natures.

She made a flourish with her garden scissors as though to cut off the heads of those imaginary beings who smiled with malicious intent and said she was talking of the smiles of a lady.

No gentlewoman deserving the name could use a smile except as a means of conciliation, as a sign of sympathy, or as an expression of pleasure.

"You have just that smile, my dear child, that does good. You have no beauty, at present, independent of a freshness that goes with youth and a clean cotton frock. Whether you will have charm remains to be seen; but that particular smile you have, and you must use it. God has given to each of us something. Whether it is the muscles of your face that contract in a particular way, I cannot say. I leave that decision to the members of the medical profession, who add considerably to the interest of life, but take away its romance. You are sympathetic, or can appear so at will, which practically comes to the same thing. Never be ashamed to show sympathy, never be ashamed to cry, if it helps others, never laugh if it hurts others, and above all smile."

It was the first time I had heard of my smile.

I followed Lady Ventnor indoors and stopped in the

hall to look at myself in a mirror that hung on the wall. "Supposing," I thought, "anyone should see me looking at myself in the glass!" and I smiled. Then it was I was astonished. The sun suddenly flooding a darkened room could not have made a difference more remarkable. Lady Ventnor was right. I must continue to smile, smile whenever I could, at every opportune moment of my life. I had until then been interested in the blind. I saw the futility of that. I must instantly work among those who could see. Unless I could use the one thing God had given me I was no good.

I smiled as I crossed the hall and all the way into the drawing-room, until I joined Lady Ventnor in the bay-window where she was arranging the roses.

"You look quite idiotic, my child," she said, looking up.

I ceased to smile. I always overdo things, so Christopher has since told me.

"Never, my child," said Lady Ventnor, "use a juicy-stalked flower as a bookmarker or attempt to press a petunia."

I promised not to.

"Why," she continued, "the most ultra-British woman should struggle to arrange flowers in a Japanese manner, I cannot imagine."

It is certain she struggled with little success.

"Here," she said, "give me those flowers."

She pressed a fat bunch into a small vase and gave the bunch a pat. "There," she said, "that's how my dear mother arranged flowers and it's how I shall arrange them till the day of my death."

It gives me a cold creep down my back when I

think it was the last time she arranged flowers — on earth.

Aunt Jolly thinks I might say "the last time" without the earthly qualification, because she is sure Lady Ventnor will not be set to do that particular thing in Heaven.

I sometimes wonder if Lady Ventnor that day made the will that left me three hundred pounds a year.

As she stood patting the flowers the butler brought in a telegram which she opened and read. Then she crushed it into a ball and threw it at the waste-paper basket.

"Tell Spain," she said, "to meet Mr. Blois by the two-ten."

Now Mr. Blois was her man of business and looked it every inch of him.

But it was not until after Lady Ventnor's death that I put two and two together. I did not smile at her funeral. I did not then know of the obligation under which she had placed me. I cried bitterly.

When I learned that my face had brought me fortune I naturally smiled, and Bobbie said my smile was bigger than my face.

I have never found it difficult to smile. But I am not sure that very facility has not tended, at times, to aggravate some people. But I could not take the money under false pretences.

We very naturally discussed the question in the schoolroom and I stuck to my point. Bobbie to his. My point was that it was my duty to smile. Bobbie, indignant, said, "Well, supposin' Aunt Jolly was killed and Muriel and Adela and Teddie and all of us died

and the house was burnt down and a fox killed all the bantams and if there was . . . something you did n't like in every single raspberry you ever eat — would you still go on smiling?"

I told Bobbie not to be silly, and he said girls never did argue fairly.

Maria took rather a different view. "If you don't mind being taken for an idiot, miss, I'm sure I don't."

But Maria has not a happy nature. She is my maid. She was once shared by three of us at home. I doubt whether any one woman could be shared by three others and not show signs of it afterwards.

Her name is Maria Betty. When I married and she came to me as my maid, we felt very strongly that to fit her for her position, she should be called by her surname. But as it was Betty it was hardly better than Maria. "Even more familiar and free," she said.

"I might call you Better," I suggested.

"Why not Best while you are making the change, miss?"

So Maria became Best in a perfectly easy manner once the habit was acquired. I said it would sound better when she stayed away with me. "No need for it then, miss," she said. "I shall always be called Mrs. Jerrold in the best houses."

"Oh," I said.

My smile comes perfectly easily. I am of an amazingly even temperament. I feel the greatest sympathy for everyone. I have no difficulty whatever in giving expression to it. The only thing I find is that I sometimes feel more for others than they feel for themselves.

I realise in some cases they are reserved, and there is no one who suffers so much as the reserved person, nor one who so glories in the suffering. I am always prepared to open the gates of their reticence, which gates I am careful to close behind me so that others may not intrude, from a spirit of idle curiosity.

I was eighteen when Lady Ventnor died and one of a family that to Aunt Jolly must have seemed immense. Having avoided responsibilities of her own, it was a little hard they should be thrust upon her by others. We all knew two colonels and three captains had proposed to her. "So you *could* have had children of your own if you had wanted to," said Bobbie. And Aunt Jolly got very pink, which Adela said was perfectly natural, under the circumstances. We were impressed by that, never before having taken Adela really seriously. But recently she had attended a lecture on astronomy, and in the face of the extraordinary things she told us about other worlds, we could not dispute her intimate knowledge of this one.

Aunt Jolly never told us the names of the colonels and captains, but we, as children, were quite sure they must be "dead-old" — the expression was Bobbie's. Whenever a distinguished general, and less frequently, of course, a field marshal died, we used to watch Aunt Jolly to see if she showed signs.

Bobbie used to say, "I expect it was him," and we walked softly and were passing kind to Aunt Jolly. In those days Bobbie thought "passing kind" meant passing all the nice things, at meals, to the one afflicted. Aunt Jolly was very kind to us. No one could have been kinder; but she found difficulty in giving expres-

sion to her feelings. The day before I was married, for instance, six times did she ask me to walk round the garden with her. Six times did we solemnly walk round without speaking. When I went to bed that night she followed me into my room and, taking up Christopher's photograph, she said, "Yes, dear."

"Yes, Aunt Jolly," I answered.

"Ma — Best has left this unpacked. It shows nice feeling on her part."

"Does n't it?" I said.

"I wonder if you will feel strange in a new county, dear; — I should not like to arrive in London at a different station, accustomed as I am to Waterloo; — but at your age these things don't matter — I have never been married, Priscilla."

I reminded her she might have been — three colonels and two captains.

"Two colonels and three captains. The captains became colonels."

"Of course, dear Aunt Jolly."

She stayed a few minutes talking aimlessly, then said, "Yes, dear, you know what I feel?"

And I said, "Yes," not knowing in the least! She went off to bed and I went to bed — quite happy. It was n't so much what she did n't say as the kind, kind way in which she did n't say it.

But I have got to my marriage without mentioning my sisters. They are undoubtedly beautiful and they most certainly have charm. But I don't know that, as girls, they particularly possessed the power of smiling. Others were so ready to smile at them that they were obliged to be constantly on their dignity. Dignity

becomes a habit with some girls, difficult to shake off. It will fit Adela beautifully when she is a bishop's wife. But while her husband is passing slowly though those clerical stages which may emerge at last at a bishopric, the habit must be laid aside and carefully folded. If when she dons it the creases are deep and show, no one will mind. But the dignified wife of a curate certainly labours under a very great disadvantage. And such an assumption on the part of Adela undoubtedly prejudices her in the eyes of the parishioners. If they cannot question the suitability of Adela's hat, they lose something of the very reason of their being, and of hers, to say nothing of the hat's. Adela's husband is constantly explaining her to the old women in his parish, and I imagine she would be very much astonished if she knew how *really* funny she is at home. We, as children, never found her that — but instructive, very. My other sister is in India. I married first, which they said was only to be expected as I had money. Girls with money always married first. It was a fact, not a speculation. Marrying me was a speculation on the part of Christopher. I feel I won him by fair means. I never deliberately smiled at him until after we were engaged. When Bobbie heard of our engagement, he wrote from school: "Give *him* my love and tell him I think he's a medium chooser of women." Christopher is very well off, so I cannot think my three hundred a year influenced him very much in his choice. I told him of the obligation under which my three hundred a year laid me and he said, was it an obligation? Could I help smiling?

I think I puzzle him, as, indeed, most wives must

most husbands. He thinks I am wonderfully good, which of course I am not, and marvellously indiscreet, which perhaps I am. While he looks at me and wonders what I am going to do next, I smile.

II

THIS is no careful chronicle of my uneventful life. To the antiquarian of some dim future day, who might care to remove the dust from its pages, it would prove but "an imperfect mirror of the domestic life of our times." I shall tell neither of what I eat nor of what Christopher drinks, nor of the wages we pay, nor of the king who reigns. Neither shall I say where I was born, nor in what parish register my name is entered. My brothers and sisters I shall mention, and little more. Of other persons as important I shall make no mention at all. To many I shall refer once and never again. Therefore, if any reader, now or in days to come, should find one character more particularly tedious than another, let him or her take heart, the tiresome person may appear but to disappear.

Only of those I honestly tried, and ignominiously failed, to understand shall I write — with a few exceptions.

The chronicle — such as it is — tells of what I tried to do from the time when I began to feel the necessity of showing universal sympathy, in order to comfort those perhaps in danger of being unhappy and misunderstood, until such time as other interests shall promise to engross me.

We live a mile or so from the village. We are just far enough away to be out of the whirl of village gaiety and clear of the quicksands of gossip.

Occasionally Christopher writes to the "Field"

about anything curious he may have seen, and the following week someone from Sussex, or elsewhere, writes to say it is a thing of the most common occurrence and where could "R. J.'s" eyes have been? Someone went so far as to say "R. J.'s" eyes were clearly the servants of his imagination.

Christopher also shoots and fishes and sits on Boards, and possesses a vast number of boots. Exactly how many pairs, Aunt Jolly alone knows, and she only counted them so that she might not be guilty of exaggeration in talking about them.

Why should she talk about Christopher's boots? As a matter of fact, she talks about Richard's boots, which might lead to confusion in the minds of her listeners. I tell her it gives me the feeling of being married to two men and she says I have brought it on myself.

His name, she argues, is Richard, and Richard she must call him.

She says the only safeguard we have is to answer to our names, and to those alone. "Otherwise, think of the confusion! Adam, with no worldly experience at all, saw the necessity of that, even with animals. If anyone addresses me as Miss Brown, I do not feel obliged to answer — in fact, if in the street I should be very careful not to do so; but if as Miss Bruce, I am bound to respond."

I tell Aunt Jolly she is quite right. I cannot imagine a worse confusion than having no name.

"That, my child, is flying to the opposite extreme. I was thinking of wrong names, which is quite bad enough."

We have three dogs, one white, one black, and one brown. They are good listeners, and, being of the honourable order of the spaniel, can answer when spoken to.

We have no children and that is why Christopher thinks I am good. He thinks it wonderful of me not to fret. Now, why should I? Have not other people children? If there were no children in the world, that would be another matter. No one would fuss more than I should, because no one sees more clearly than I do how essential they are to the well-being of a nation.

The attitude of some women with children, to women without, is unnecessarily and curiously kind. It has gradually dawned upon me that, to some of them, I am an object of pity, and, knowing how happy I am, it surprises me.

I notice some of them have ceased to talk to me about their children, and one whispered to the nurse not to bring the baby down because Mrs. Jerrold was there, and he was such a darling!

It amazes me! That they do it from the kindest motives I know; but how little they understand me!

I tell them I love babies; I love to see them. The mothers look surprised. They seem to suggest I am lacking in the true feminine instinct. Perhaps I lack it! If so I have determined that, in every other respect, as a wife, I shall not fail Christopher. I sometimes wonder if under his persistent cheerfulness there gnaws a secret sorrow. Perhaps I have failed to understand him, and to understand him and others is the object of my life, since I am denied its supreme joy. I am very happy; so happy that I am sometimes afraid. And

fearing that, in my own happiness, I might grow callous to the disappointments of others I have made the following resolutions.

That Christopher being denied so much shall always have the morning paper first, "Punch" directly it arrives, and the "Spectator."

That he shall open all my parcels and letters, to make up.

That he shall have fresh tea even if it has only stood ten minutes, to make up.

That he shall have what he likes to eat and only what he likes, to make up.

That I shall never contradict him unless he has set out to be contradicted, then I shall not disappoint him, neither shall my obstinacy fall short of his expectation; nor at its coming shall my "giving-in" lack completeness.

That as I grow older, and my complexion fades, and my hair perhaps grows grey, and my knees stiffen, I shall have girls in the house, to amuse him. Very pretty girls with infectious laughs and happy smiles and charming, coaxing ways, who will tell him how young he looks.

That if, at times, the longing for a son grows so great as to cause him real pain, I shall judiciously read him accounts of sons not wholly satisfactory, — sons in debt; sons in divorce courts; sons in theatrical circles; sons in general difficulties, arising from weakness of will and sweetness of disposition, — of all sons the most difficult to deal with, since their faults are largely born of their mother's fondness; sons ugly; sons vulgar!

If that fails, I shall gently, in a hushed voice, tell him of the deaths of sons. But that desperate measure only as a last resource. If he should yearn for a daughter who should have been as the light of his eyes, I shall tell him stories of girls who do all the things he most detests, who marry the kind of men he most dislikes. I shall disparage their legs and shall say unkind and untrue things about Jerrold ankles; which statement he can refute by telling me the story of the Jerrold ancestress, of long ago, whose ankles were toasted every night at the Court of St. James's — you know the sort of "toasted," I mean, of course?

If at the end of such a relation as mine, Christopher shall say, "Priscilla, my darling, there is no doubt about it, we have been spared a great deal. We have, indeed, much to be thankful for," I shall smile and shall probably go and tidy his tie-drawer.

I shall appoint myself censor to the cricket scores of friends' sons. To a century I shall take a penknife.

It is possible Christopher may not take things hardly.

He may, perhaps, as I do, live his life over again in the children of his friends. But it is only natural he should feel things differently, because he is more truly masculine than I am really feminine. I shall, whatever happens, make him happy. On that I am determined. Such is the nature of my resolutions!

Sometimes a day-dream creeps unbidden to my mind. It is this: that some day, as we are nearing the bottom of the steep hill of life, Christopher will turn to me and will say, "Priscilla, my love, it's a steep hill. I never noticed it coming up."

And I shall say, "Very steep, Christopher, but for your strong arm I should undoubtedly have fallen, yet I ran up it alone!"

"Not far," Christopher will say; "I remember waiting for you and wondering if you had started!"

Then with my eyes on the ground I shall say, "Our children, if we had been given them, would certainly have fallen down, running up."

And when Christopher says, "Yes, your children would have been so reckless," I shall at once acquiesce. "Undoubtedly they would, Christopher; it is best as it is; they are safer, as they are, in the dreams of my heart. And other children you would not have cared for?"

And he will say, "No, Priscilla, no other children, only yours and mine. It was not children I wanted; it was your child."

And having gained my point I shall walk on, feeling the journey has been gloriously worth while, and together Christopher and I will cross the river which leads to that world where things are more evenly divided and where there are probably enough babies to go round, and where every woman will be the mother of all the babies, even as it might be in this world if women were only a little less human and a great deal more feminine.

But to return to our village. The curate has five babies under six. He rarely smiles, unless I smile at him, which I feel it my duty to do. Christopher says I must n't encourage him.

We have a lovely garden and three gardeners-proper. There are, besides, three boys — the weed-boy, the

vegetable-boy, and the mow-boy. They are small people. Besides their hearts the only big things about them are the white bone buttons to which their breeches are braced.

One of the gardeners is a Roman Catholic, one a Dissenter, and the third a bachelor. Mr. Bayes, the vicar, visits them all in turn. He, like the third gardener, is a bachelor. Christopher says that is why he visits them all alike. I wonder!

If that is the case I think it best to leave Mr. Bayes as he is; otherwise there is the governess at the Lane's who is a charming young woman, well-bred, with a leaning towards matrimony which she naturally seeks to disguise, and does most successfully from Mr. Bayes.

Christopher tells me to be prudent and not meddle. I am prudent by nature. On principle I do not meddle. But is it right to allow the governess to work stoles for Mr. Bayes? Can his shoulders bear the burden of the obligation? Christopher says, What have I got to do with it? — and I smile.

The village grows on either side of the road and dips down where every evening the sun goes. To see the sunset at its best — and it's a glorious best sometimes — you must climb the next hill. It's worth it.

The village proper ends with old Mangold's house at the bottom of the hill. The cottages look as if they really grew, because their roofs are thatched and on them grow tufts and bunches of interloping things, which stand out delightfully against the sky. The walls are covered with creepers and in due season with roses which peep in at the windows of those cottages whose

casements are set wide. They are few, I must own, and most of the roses tap in vain and never gain admittance. Christopher says I can't say "bo" to a goose. I shew him I can; but willingly admit that I cannot say "no" to a rose.

The rest of the village is scattered, a house here and there. In one of them the vicar lives. He lets the vicarage to the Lanes, because it takes money to keep up and he has none. But he has, he says, more than money. I think I know what he means. His living-room has whitewashed walls and its ceiling boasts beams and his bookshelves bear books, and he has a twinkle in his eyes which makes his religion a thing very human and acceptable. He is welcomed by everyone in the village, even on washing-days. Few people can boast that. It is possible a curate may; but no king.

Miss Trant wonders if Mr. Bayes is *quite* serious enough. The emphasis on the word "quite" qualifies any suggestion of criticism.

Christopher says Bayes must n't marry; it would ruin him.

And I say, "Is that a compliment, to me, a woman?"

And he, smiling, says, "Have I ever paid you a compliment?"

And I shake my head.

"You are a beautiful woman," he ventures, by way of shewing what he can do when he tries.

And I say, "My dear man, no one has ever called me that before."

"They may yet," he says.

I can do without compliments. I have so much in life. I want to do something for others. I want to

understand. I want to give of myself. Christopher says he does n't understand the expression.

To give money, I explain, is nothing, if you have it.

"You can't give it if you have n't," he says.

I beg him to be serious. I want to give something that costs. I want the world to be better for my being in it.

Christopher says it tends to egotism. What can I do that anybody else can't do — perhaps better? Probably nothing. But I want to try.

I want to help the blind to see; the lame to walk. Why should I have eyes that see and legs that walk?

Christopher says, Why should n't I?

He does n't understand. I love him; but his is the nature that says when the egg is hard-boiled once a year, and never sends a message of congratulation to the cook on the three hundred and sixty-four days when it is soft.

We had been married three years when I told Christopher I felt I was leading a useless and selfish life.

He looked very grave. "Poor child," he said, running his hand over my hair. I often wonder what would have happened if he had married a wife who wore hair-nets. He would have made a large hole in the three hundred a year.

I sat at his feet. He likes the domesticity of a wife sitting at his feet, and I like it, too, on occasions, because when I talk to him seriously I don't like him to see my face, nor do I care to see his. In either case it proves disturbing.

"Why?" I said, nettled at being called a "poor child" when I am extremely happy and only anxious

to pass on to others a share of what I possess in such abundance.

"Never mind, you are a good child."

"Why? I am not in the least good, but I am extraordinarily happy and I want to make others happy. I want them to feel they have someone to come to in their joys and sorrows and their difficulties."

Christopher suggested I was trespassing on Bayes's preserves.

I said, No. That there were things a bachelor could n't do. That women could n't go to a bachelor with some of their troubles.

"Yet," said Christopher, "he is the very person to solve, at least, the one difficulty for the one woman."

"Then there's the money difficulty," I said, not deigning to notice Christopher's flippant remark. "Mr. Bayes has none."

"Why not make him the banker?"

"Because it would n't help me. Writing a cheque payable to Geoffrey Bayes would n't be a sufficient outlet. I want to be kind to girls without mothers; to mothers without daughters; to young men without girls; to girls without young men; to spinsters in *pensions;* to head-housemaids of ten years ago — what has become of them, Christopher? I mean who were elderly ten years ago?"

"Pensioned, we will hope. You must n't forget hedgehogs without prickles and hens without chickens. Is there a greater iniquity than the incubator? Bringing chickens into the world without mothers; robbing hen-roosts is nothing to cheating hens of the maternal instinct — Priscilla, I'm sorry I said that!"

"Maternal instinct? You may say it as often as you like, if only you will be serious."

"And what do you want me to do for these 'has-beens' and 'never-weres'?"

"I want your permission to help everyone I can."

"Of course you have that, so long as they keep out of my room. I should n't like to find a spinster from a *pension*, promoted to my den, in my armchair, with her feet on my mantelpiece. You understand that?"

I understood it perfectly, and having got Christopher serious I went on: "Women don't know what to do with their babies sometimes. I love borrowing a baby. There 's a field for childless women! I should love to take a baby out for the day — to dump a pink-and-white baby down into a wood carpeted with blue hyacinths. I should tell it stories till its eyes got so big!"

"How big?" asked Christopher anxiously.

I showed him, making a circle with my finger and thumb. He said he was relieved. He should n't like eyes out of all proportion to the size of the baby; besides, it would be a shock to the mother if she got a baby returned, with eyes twice too big for its face.

"If you *could* be serious, Christopher!" I pleaded.

"But I am."

"It would be such a help to the mother."

"In establishing a precedent, I 'm not sure."

"Don't."

"Forgive me, Priscilla. I am treating a serious subject with an inexcusable levity. And where would you dump a red-haired baby?"

"In brown bracken, of course."

"You would be careful of brambles? To dump a red-haired baby down on to a bramble would amount to cruelty. You are a quaint person, Priscilla."

"Why?" I asked.

Christopher is slow to understand. Will he ever get over the idea that I am labouring under the weight of a great sorrow and that the fact of my happiness arises from nothing better than goodness.

Have I made it quite clear that Christopher's name is Richard, that he is squire of Dell, that he is good to look on, and in some ways clever? That Priscilla, before she became his wife, was left three hundred pounds a year because her smile was pleasant? That she feels it her duty to use that which God and the kindness of Lady Ventnor have given her?

That to do otherwise, she considers, would be taking money under false pretences? That Christopher Jerrold is thirty-three; I, Priscilla, his wife, am ten years, ten months, and two days younger?

If I have made all that clear I will here end the chapter.

III

DELL is an old manor house. Its many rooms are long and low. Its windows are mullioned. Its chimneys are twisted. There are no two of them alike. Most chimneys are insistently ugly things; the Dell chimneys are things of beauty.

Long-haired, long-legged boys come down from architectural schools to draw them. At the end of the day they are covered with pencil dust — the boys not the chimneys — and I give them a jammy, sconey, sit-down tea, which they love.

The chimneys are pointed out to visitors, who look at them and say, "How charming! I should love to build a house!" unless the sun happens to be shining in their eyes, in which case they look away blinking. I think it is in the heart of most of us to build a house. It seems a perfectly natural impulse. Those architectural boys build on that — as do their parents. I should certainly not have the wit to build such a house as Dell; but within most of us lies the power to dream of the perfect home, and most certainly of such a house should I have dreamed. It lies in a hollow — as do most houses of its date. A gem set in a wide bowl. Which bowl itself is of gold and copper in autumn; in winter set with the frost of diamonds; in spring with the sapphires of bluebells; in summer with the emeralds of leaves and grass.

Through the grass, like a ribbon threaded, runs a river; or perhaps it would prefer to be called a trout-

stream; as such it has won recognition, renown even.

The furniture in the house is old and we are told, by those in authority, of greater value than we know. Whether it is valuable or not neither adds to nor detracts from its value in our eyes. It is valuable to us possibly because it is beautiful and certainly because Christopher's ancestors sat in the chairs, and slept in the beds, and put their elbows on the tables. I wonder if they did that? I think probably not. Judging by their portraits the children were too good and the men too closely encased in armour. What, on the tables, might be the marks of the point of an armoured elbow I am assured are no older than the first of Christopher's teeth.

Of neighbours the Danbys are our nearest. Lady Danby is very beautiful. We are very proud of her. Anyone might suppose we took credit to ourselves in the matter. When we take our friends to church, one of the inducements offered is the Norman font, the other Lady Danby's profile. It stands out wonderfully against the black marble figure of a Danby of long ago. One might almost expect the dark sternness of his features to relax at the juxtaposition of anything so lovely as the softness of Daphne's cheek.

"And Bayes's sermon," adds Christopher when he enumerates the inducements offered. But I say you can't expect people to be really grateful for a good sermon since the clergyman is there for the express purpose of giving it. Surprise they may express. But for a profile like Lady Danby's you expect them to show gratitude. Americans do, and they pass their hand

lovingly over the surface of the Norman font and are very interested in its wonderful polish. In Lady Danby's face they find more than lies on the surface. They have the true feeling for things beautiful and young and old. A young man staying with the Danbys said to an American staying with us, "You have nothing old in America?"

"We have lots of old men and women — grand old men and women," said our friend thoughtfully.

The Danbys have three little girls. The eldest and youngest are lovely. The middle one is not beautiful, but has that charm which makes her very fascinating. Some day she will hate having to say "No," to the men who will love her, and she will say it in such a way that it will in no way deter them from going on loving her all the more. She has often been my borrowed baby. One day Christopher was shooting at Lonedene and I was waiting for him. I had had tea with Daphne. It was the children's hour. I sat on the floor and played with them, while their mother listened to the confidences of a young man who had come in early from shooting with toothache or earache, I forget which. Christopher says, it is immaterial which; either would answer the young man's purpose.

The baby, aged seven, was playing with the baby aged five.

"I've had mother longer than you," said the elder baby.

"No, you havun't," said the younger baby indignantly.

"Yes, I was born first."

"No, you were n't. I was here first, but I was sent back to God to get a new face."

Something tightened at my throat and I put up my hand to loosen my collar. The seven-year-old baby stood nonplussed for a moment, then with great dignity drew herself up and said: —

"No, you are wrong, darlin'. God always, always finishes His babies before He sends them."

"Here, darling," I said to the five-year-old baby, "come here."

"No, thanks, I'm busy."

It's not all of us who can accept defeat with such dignity.

She also accepted, at my hands, a pencil and paper and began to draw. I knelt beside her and bent over her. Such a delicious sweet-smelling baby she was, but her hair tickled my nose and I stood up.

"You may look," she said kindly.

I knelt down again.

"What are you drawing, Pickles?" I asked.

"God," she said.

"I should draw something else, darling, because no one knows what God is like."

"They will when I've done," she said complacently, wetting the point of her pencil with the extreme tip of her very small tongue. I kissed the back of her neck where a baby is most delicious and she shrugged her shoulders and wriggled.

"I can't draw if you do that," she said, looking reproachfully at me. Seeing I was really sorry, she promised me the picture for my very, very own self, — if I did n't give it to the postman.

When Christopher came in with the other men they found me on the floor. "She's a baby herself," I heard him say.

"You are a dear thing," said Daphne when she said good-bye.

I asked, "Why?" and she laughed.

"Well, for one thing your husband says you are never cross; is that true?"

"Why should I be cross, Christopher?" I said, as we drove home.

"There's no reason why you should; there's infinitely less reason why you should n't." Then after a pause: "Lady Danby is a wonderful mother, is n't she?"

"Why," I asked, "is she a wonderful mother?"

"The children look so clean," said Christopher lamely.

"There are four nurses to keep three children clean."

"Of course," he said hurriedly. "Who was the woman in grey at lunch? I suppose she was the wife of the man in —"

"In green? Yes, but why change the subject? I love talking about the children. But what astonishes me is that anyone should be surprised at a woman being a good mother."

"A matter of course? It ought to be. I have often thought in reading a book of travels that it was rather unnecessary, on the part of the writer, to say the native women seem fond of their children. You're a good woman, Priscilla!"

Now there is a time and a place for all things and it was no use, while driving home, trying to convince

Christopher I was n't anything of the sort. I waited until after dinner. Then I told him I was n't in the least good.

He asked if it was n't goodness that traced the fine line that came sometimes between my two eyebrows? Was n't the line there because I was worrying about the unhappiness of someone who was in all probability perfectly happy?

"That line," I said, "is there because of the workhouse."

Christopher made as though, with his finger, he would rub out the line; but I imprisoned the finger and told him the line would remain there just so long as the workhouse remained the only refuge for the deserving poor. That it was not until every landowner in England realised what it meant to the poor, darling, old things, that the line would go.

Christopher said he could only see none of his people ever went there; more he could n't do.

I said he might try and imagine, for one moment, what it must be for a delicious, darling, old woman to leave the home she loves in which she has been a wife, a mother, a grandmother, a widow — all that makes life worth living.

"Does being a widow do that?" he asked.

"Don't laugh," I said, "I'm serious."

At that he settled down to listen.

I urged him to put himself in the place of the darling old woman, to feel what her disgrace must be —

Here he stopped me; there should be no disgrace.

"But there is. The name alone — workhouse — union. To go to a home of rest should be looked upon

as a just reward at the end of a long life, to a faithful man or woman. It should be called by such a name as to make the enforced inhabitation a thing of glory, a thing to boast of. The grandchildren of such an old woman should be pointed out as the grandchildren of one honoured among her fellows. Other children should say, 'Their grannie, she lives — ' "

"Ah, where?" said Christopher, "there's the difficulty. What are you going to call a place that is n't a home?"

I ignored that difficulty. It could be surmounted. Even horses had homes of rest, with no indignity attached to them.

I went on to say that the day on which some old woman was to go into this home should be a day of rejoicing in the village. The Lord Lieutenant of the county should come with an escort, a guard of honour. He should take the dear old woman from her cottage and, with her hand on his arm, she should make a triumphant progress through the village. The Lord Lieutenant in leading her across the threshold of her new home should say, "Honoured madam, foundation of much of England's glory, enter! Within these portals you will find an honoured rest. Over the porch through which we have just come will riot the honeysuckle of contentment! On the walls of the house will ramble roses of restfulness, fragrant and beautiful. In the garden tall lilies will grow, whose name is grace. In purple profusion pansies will flourish, bringing back to your mind sweet memories. Tall foxgloves will serve to remind you of the childhood of your children; in the thimble of each blossom shall steal once more

the finger of your little girl. In forget-me-nots you shall match the colour of your babies' eyes; in the silver honesty you shall see their souls; in the sweet-peas watch the flight of butterflies. In sweet williams breathe again the name of the man you loved; with the daisies in the grass once more wreathe chains for your children's necks; in the primroses of spring find the fulfilment of youth's promise —"

Christopher laid a restraining hand on mine. "You are not imagining Danby saying all this, are you?" he said, evidently fearing for Danby's reason.

"Yes, and more; he will go on: 'You have lived, madam, and brought up a family, on what I have, week by week, spent on cigars. You have brought up sons, soldier sons and sailor sons. Rest here in peace. Honoured shall be the evening of your life. Tea you shall have in abundance, around you all your treasures; your cat shall sit in the chimney corner; your favoured friend beside you. Rent day shall be a thing of no account. You can snap your worn fingers at it.'"

"I hope you feel quite well, Priscilla, not feverish?" said Christopher, taking my hand. "It's all very well, but what are the sailor sons, the soldier sons doing that they don't support the mother in her old age, who has done so much for them?"

"Well, a woman without children!"

He allowed that was different.

"There's my three hundred a year," I said.

Christopher said it was wonderful what that three hundred a year was going to do. What about the babies?

I said surely three hundred a year should go a long way with babies and old women. "Let's see," he said, taking from his pocket an unsympathetic pencil and an envelope.

"No sinking-funds," I pleaded. "No allowing for depreciations."

He smiled. "We must presume," he said, "the darling old ladies may depreciate. The babies, if properly fed, should increase, at least, in weight. Oh, you absurd Priscilla," he said, throwing the pencil, the paper, and reason to the winds, "let's talk about something else!"

Christopher has a way of putting an end to an argument which he thinks absolutely conclusive — not the argument, the end. I admit it is very nice, but it only postpones the argument.

Christopher might laugh, but I imagine, on that day, were laid the foundations of my home of peace for the old people of Dell.

Best said she did n't think women should be encouraged to be widows. Nor men either for the matter of that. There were enough without making more. I told her I did not see how widows could be made by encouragement. She said she was not the only one to say it. It had been said in the village that I favoured widows.

Dear Best, she was vexed with me. I had that morning inadvertently surprised her softer side. We had had several dull, cheerless, sunless days and as she was doing my hair I looked out of the window and said, "I think we are going to have a little sun, Best!"

"Oh, ma'am!" said Best.

A thrill in her voice made me look at her face in the glass. It was radiant. I hastily added, "It has been so cloudy for days."

But Best is slow to forgive.

IV

I ENTERED upon what I chose to call my new life on a lovely May morning. I threw up, one by one. my bedroom windows and drank in deep draughts of the lovely, fresh, morning air. I kissed my hand to a passing swallow and sent a message to the baby clouds, sailing away through the blue sky, to tell them they really need n't wear their "woollies," it was so warm; I had left off mine.

The swallow came back almost immediately, no doubt to say that one of his kind was no fit messenger to send to baby clouds, who knew more about summer than he did. That it took many swallows to know half as much as one fleecy baby cloud knew; that those nearest the heavens hear most of the whisperings of winds, and the secret the winds treasure above all others is the date of the summer's coming. Theirs is the power to hold her back as long as they will. I waved an apology to the baby clouds and turned to find Best, brush in hand, waiting for me, with that expression on her face which used in the days of long ago to mean, "If you don't come and have your hair done at once, and no nonsense, back to bed you go!"

"Life's a wonderful thing, dear Best," I said.

"It will be death soon with you," she snapped with her eyes on the garments I had not put on.

"It's so warm," I pleaded.

"It's not summer for all that."

"I saw a swallow just now."

"One swallow does n't make a summer, everyone knows that."

"Even the baby clouds; you are as bad as they are!"

"It's not babies in clouds I'm bothering about. I know where I'd rather see a baby — a baby gives people something to do — keeps them out of mischief."

Poor Best!

"I still say, Best, life *is* a wonderful thing!"

"To some people, ma'am, as have the things to enjoy and no troubles. Mrs. Larkspur, poor soul, is n't thinking much of the spring morning to-day."

"What's the matter with Mrs. Larkspur?" I asked.

"Why, her boys go to-day — emigrate, they call it, who have never been called upon to do it. Tearing up by the roots I should call it, if not worse. And the things they say to that woman by way of cheering her up, poor soul! Mr. Bayes has said all sorts of beautiful things about the mothers of England and what Mrs. Larkspur has done for England, and what England would have been if there had n't been mothers like Mrs. Larkspur — but it's no comfort to a woman when a bachelor takes upon himself to say things like that. Mrs. Larkspur rightly said she did n't see where England's good comes in, sending away the best. If it was for the boy's good, it was enough for mothers, or should be. You can't expect Mrs. Larkspur to drag England in. That won't comfort her, nor anything else until she grows accustomed to the feeling of being without what she's given her life for."

"Are they delicate, the boys?" I asked.

"Delicate? I never saw finer lads, though I say it as should n't, having nothing to do with them."

It struck me that that perhaps entitled Best to say anything she liked. But I did not say so. Best's mood was one best left alone.

My mind was full of poor Mrs. Larkspur. Here, I thought, was a chance to show sympathy. I told Christopher, at breakfast, that later in the day I was going to sit with Mrs. Larkspur. I felt sure she would like it. Christopher said he was sure it was the last thing she would like. She would only want to be left alone. I told him I had no intention of speaking to her; that to all intents and purposes she would be alone, but she would *feel* I was sympathising with her, that her sorrow was my sorrow.

Christopher shrugged his shoulders. But later in the day I went. Softly I walked up the flagged path which ran from the little wooden gate to the cottage door. Gently I knocked on the door, avoiding a blister in the green paint. It was opened by the poor mother herself. It was then I realised the dumb tragedies in the lives of the poor.

I held out my hand. With one of hers she took it; with the other she held her apron to her eyes.

"May I come in?" I said gently.

"As you will, ma'am," she said.

She stepped aside. I felt it to be a silent invitation, but an eloquent one. She dusted a chair and I sat down. I begged her to sit down. She sat down.

We said nothing. It is one of the most difficult things to do.

At last I could bear it no longer and said: "Don't talk, Mrs. Larkspur, I want you just to feel I am here."

It was a relief even to have said those few words.

It depends so much on how one says things.

And so we sat. On the table between us lay a half-eaten rice pudding. "Did I disturb you?" I said, indicating the pudding.

She shook her head. "I could n't bring myself to touch a bit of it," she said, in a broken voice. "It's what I made for my boys — bless their dear hearts."

I asked if they liked rice pudding and she said they did, hers.

I said, "Of course." My voice broke in sympathy.

The pudding opened the flood gates of her pent-up emotions. She talked of the boys from their earliest infancy. She told me, what was so true, that ladies did n't do for their children what the poor did for theirs. The children of mothers like herself owed everything to their mothers. "It's that, ma'am, that makes the difference. The more you do for a child, the more the child depends. The more he depends, the more he looks to and loves."

I nodded. It was not the moment nor was it in my heart to stand up for the other mothers. Here was I with my finger on an open wound; the slightest pressure and the agony would be unbearable. What she said about mothers and their children was quite beautiful. Her dear, tear-stained face shone with a radiance that lent a beauty to features that in themselves possessed none.

Having said all there was to say she relapsed into silence and in silence we sat. I, for my part, so that she should feel there was someone aching for her; she, on her part, no doubt, because there was nothing more to

say. I looked at her as little as possible; but every now and then my eyes were drawn to her face.

Her eyes, unseeing, were fixed on the clock. Her hands were twisted in her apron; her lips were tightly closed. There was a strange silence in the cottage. We sat, she and I, with our common grief.

"Don't talk, please, Mrs. Larkspur," I said, when she changed her position, and she shook her head. Every now and then she grew restless. Once she got up and looked behind the screen. It seemed as though she were a young mother again, the boys children, hiding behind the screen; the mother pretending she could n't find them. In a tiny cottage a mother must pretend more than this.

In silence we continued to sit; at last Mrs. Larkspur dozed.

From the pathos of her face in repose, I was learning my lesson . . . when suddenly, from behind the screen, came the report of a loud sneeze. Mrs. Larkspur sat up.

"I'm sure I beg your pardon, ma'am, it 's my sister Betsy. She was always shy of the gentry. She does n't understand them as I do, not having lived in the best families. It's very kind of you, I 'm sure, and it 's very good of Mr. Jerrold to spare you for so long, and it 's been a help, seein' the spirit in which it was meant, but Betsy *did* come up from Southampton to be with me; being a widow with no children, there 's nothing to hinder her; and a sister 's a sister in sorrow when all 's said and done. She 's caught one of her colds and it 's her fault, sticking behind that screen, giving me the jumps into the bargain."

I had learnt my lesson.

I told Christopher, because I felt it the honest thing to do.

He asked if the wretched sister was behind the screen the whole time, which was what Bobbie calls "rubbing it in." Christopher knows now that to make me blush he has only to say the word "larkspur." I never see one without blushing, and as they grow tall and blue in every cottage garden in summer, I do not lose my colour as some people do in hot weather. That is Christopher's little joke. I would rather he joked on other subjects.

I shall never forget that screen. To my dying day I shall see a screen covered in American cloth, brown, with a pattern on it of green spots and crosses, alternately.

The path I had chosen to tread was not an easy one and Christopher was always begging me to be prudent and not hurry.

V

I FOUND easily enough a baby that wanted love. I had not even to advertise. She fell, as it were, into my arms. I met Miss Trant in the village and she asked me for a subscription to a convalescent home for babies. I promised the money, but wanted to hear more about the babies.

"There is one poor little mite in particular," said Miss Trant, "who came to the home a bag of bones. She has grown flourishing and portly and the time has come when she must go back to make room for others. Going back in her case means to starvation."

"How old is she?" I asked, thinking of the Danby children.

"She's three."

"And she must go back to starvation?"

Miss Trant nodded.

"Miss Trant," I said, "you won't tell anyone, will you, but I've been making a plan to help everyone I can, as much as I can."

"It's no very new plan, is it?" she said, drawing a baby on the road with the point of her stick.

I said it was quite new. Only two days ago had I seriously begun.

"Your face has belied you, then," she said.

I got the baby's name and went home and wrote to the matron of the convalescent home asking if I might have that particular baby for six months.

In the course of a few days that baby was, to all

intents and purposes, mine. My promise to Christopher prevented me having her at Dell because she was, I hoped, only the first of many babies. So I set about to find a home for her. First of all I looked for a garden that should in time have hollyhocks. It is the right background for all babies. They should learn to measure their extreme smallness by the height of a pink hollyhock. The tiptop bud is a goal worth making for.

I found what I wanted in our coachman's garden. His wife has no children. "More time to see to other things, ma'am," she had often said.

I told her about the baby. She pretended it was a great undertaking, that she had nothing, so to speak, for a child. I sat on the edge of the kitchen table and pondered. "There's Mrs. Sharp," I said thoughtfully.

"She's got seven already and never anything fit to be seen, as it is," said Mrs. Blow, getting crimson. "There's no satisfyin' some people," she added snappily. I smiled. Then remembering Best had said, quite lately, that a Squire's lady should not sit on a table, that it had been remarked upon by more than one, I stood down.

Mrs. Blow went to the cupboard beside the fireplace and brought out a bundle of iron rods. In the twinkling of an eye it assumed the shape of a child's bed.

"There's the other things upstairs," she said.

"I never knew, Mrs. Blow!" I said gently.

"We don't talk about it—leastways to you, ma'am."

"Why not to me? I understand!"

"It's a subject as might hurt you, ma'am."

How little they understood me, all these good people and even Christopher. I have often seen him hurriedly

turn over the picture of a Mellin's Food baby when we have been looking at a paper together, and I have put my hand on his dear brown one and have turned the pages back. I can well bear to look at a *very* fat baby.

Mrs. Blow took the bed to pieces and put it together again upstairs. She stood it at the foot of hers; "within sight," she told me later.

Liz was to be ready the following day and Miss Trant and I motored to fetch her.

She was a plebeian-looking child, healthy enough, but I was a little ashamed that I did n't instantly love her. I was disappointed to find my heart kind but cold — a horrible state to get into.

Liz was not communicative. Do what we could we could n't make her speak. I handed her over to Mrs. Blow, who held out her capacious arms; arms that should, by rights, have held many babies. I determined they should.

"She's a nice-looking child, ma'am, though I say it as should n't. A bit stocky, ain't she?" There was n't a noise or grimace Mrs. Blow made that was n't perfectly maternal and finished.

The next morning I went down to see Liz and took with me a little go-cart. "I am going to take you for a ride, Liz," I said triumphantly.

"Say 'Thank you' to the kind lady and curtsey," said Mrs. Blow, anxious that her child should do her credit, so quickly does motherhood become a habit. Not a bit of it. Liz turned her sharp little eyes on me and said, "Where's m' motor-car?"

So quickly does the habit of luxury become ours.

Christopher said it was the spirit of the age, and anxious not to appear prejudiced on the subject of Liz, I admitted it and said it was tactless, too, when staying in a coachman's house.

Christopher said Liz at her age should know better.

I told him he would n't care for her and he said he would do her no harm, but I knew what he expected in little girls; the standard he required. Liz fell far short of it.

That same evening I said to Christopher, "I did n't know the Blows had lost a child. My heart aches for Mrs. Blow."

"The Blows, never!" he exclaimed. "You must n't overstrain that heart of yours."

"But," I said, "Mrs. Blow told me so."

He said it was very odd, he had known Blow all his life. "A coachman can't have a baby and his master not know."

"But his wife might," I ventured.

"It's very odd, all the same. I've passed that cottage every day of my life — almost. It might have happened when I was abroad, when I went round the world. Are you sure she said so? Blow's a wonderful manager. It's just the sort of thing he would do when the family was away."

"But —"

"I've known the Blow washing by sight for years and I never saw anything smaller than Blow's shirts and Mrs. Blow's —"

"You are absurd, Christopher!"

"I am wondering who is the most absurd; you, I, or Mother Blow. Did she really tell you?"

"She did n't tell me in so many words, but of course I understood when she showed me, or rather tried not to show me, a bed. An un-understanding person is shown a bed and asks whose it was; an understanding person is shown a bed and *knows;* that's what I mean by understanding."

"It is possible, my prudent Priscilla, to understand more than sometimes exists."

This was a matter that required clearing up; I made a point of calling on Mrs. Blow, making Liz the excuse. I brought the subject of conversation round to the bed by way of a gentle enquiry as to how Liz had slept; was the bed comfortable?

"It's comfortable enough, ma'am," said Mrs. Blow reluctantly.

"Whose bed was it?" I said, going straight to the point.

"Well, ma'am, I should n't have mentioned it if you had n't asked. It was Master Richard's — Mr. Jerrold's, I beg your pardon. He slept here once for a few nights, after the fire at the house, and they sent down his bed. They never took it back because it was small for him as it was — and they said it could go back any time if it was wanted, which, of course, it could at any moment. I've kept it oiled and free from rust."

I walked home. That evening I told Christopher he had been quite right, the Blows had never had a child, I had *over*-understood.

It was an admission I found hard to make.

Christopher leant forward and knocked the end off his cigar.

"I was asking Blow about it," he said, "and Blow

says they had, when I was abroad. Strangely enough, they were twins."

I asked, Why strange? It seemed to me to be one of the few cases where nature might bestow twins without being accused of playing a practical joke; Mrs. Blow looked quite capable of dealing with twins.

"Yes, no doubt," said Christopher, "the funny thing was n't so much the twins as the fact that the Blows called the boy Richard and by some strange freak of fortune the girl Priscilla, and Mrs. Blow does n't want you to know. It was n't really a freak of fortune because it was her grandmother's name, so Blow says they were within their rights."

Christopher was evidently amused, so I smiled, but in reality I was distressed. My understanding had in part failed me. My heart was wrung for Mrs. Blow. I asked Christopher how old the twins were when they died?

"The twins?" he said. "They only lived just long enough to be christened — Richard and Priscilla. Does history, by the way, invariably repeat itself?"

I said I imagined Mrs. Blow to be a little too old to bear excitement of that kind and he smiled and went on smiling.

In part my understanding had not failed me. Mrs. Blow had had a child. My understanding instinctively knew it by the way she had put up that bed. By the way in which she had touched it. By the maternal way in which she had screwed on the brass knob.

But my understanding had failed me in that I had allowed it to be overruled by Christopher. I told him

Mrs. Blow had of course been within her rights; besides, she had n't known of my existence.

"Did you exist?" he said.

"Of course if it was when you went round the world I must have been eight."

"It makes me a little jealous to think you existed and I did n't know it. You ought to have been unable to exist!"

Dear Christopher!

VI

MISS CORDELIA TRANT is at once the object of our excitement and our interest. Our interest because we always expect her to do unexpected things which she never does; our excitement because we feel that although she does n't do things it lies within the unplumbed possibilities of her character that she may.

She hinders Mr. Bayes by helping him, as many single women do most unmarried clergymen.

When I had known her nearly three years and liked her immensely, she asked me to call her by her Christian name and I could n't. Neither could I bring myself to hurt her feelings by not doing so. For weeks in writing to her I resorted to the use of postcards. It is a refuge everyone has sought at some time or other. Not to call a person by his or her Christian name is a cowardice difficult to excuse, yet very easy to understand. In some cases the very name may prevent. The way the hair grows — something in the voice — the austerity of a manner. A thousand things may prevent just that familiarity without which one can dearly like another.

Christopher says he can't imagine why I can't call Cordelia, "Cordelia." He says he can call anyone anything. It's simply, he says, a matter of habit. He advised me to be bold and out with it. Besides, it showed a want of understanding on my part. Perhaps poor Cordelia had no one to call her so. I might be failing her just when she most wanted sympathy.

That decided me; I went down the village bent on calling on Miss Trant and on calling her "Cordelia." I knocked at her cottage door. It was opened by the very small servant she is careful to call by her surname. I like Cordelia's little maid and I looked at her boots and smiled. They reminded me of a story Cordelia had told me, which was that the little servant had asked one day if she might go into the town, and Cordelia, knowing full well that the girl had been in only a very short time before, felt it her duty to ask why she wished to go. The handmaid smilingly said she wanted to go in about boots.

"But you went in about boots only the other day, Hardacre," said Cordelia.

"Yes, ma'am," said the maiden. "M' mother says I'm a perfect morth at m' boots."

Miss Trant was in the garden and the little moth said, would I go and find her? I said I would, of course. The little moth was hung round with dusters. It was doubtless the day on which Cordelia's very small drawing-room suffered the indignity of being "turned out."

I got into the garden by taking one step from the drawing-room window on to the middle of the lawn.

If Cordelia should be at the other end of the garden, I should hear the sound of her spud.

Like a thrush listening for worms I put my head on one side, and listened. There was no sound but the buzzing of bees, the twitter of birds, and what I call the hot sounds of summer.

Here was my chance! I don't like to say that in answer to prayer I seemed to gain courage, because it might sound irreverent to those who don't understand;

but I may say I invoked a power higher than my own to give me the strength to utter the name which came with such difficulty to my lips.

"Cor-de-l-i-a!" I called.

It was so loud that quite a number of people in the village must know now that I called Miss Trant by her Christian name. As a girl blushes on breathing for the first time the name of the man she loves, I blushed. From behind the nearest bush rose Cordelia, flushed and delighted.

"Dear Mrs. Jerrold, how nice of you!"

I begged her to call me "Priscilla."

"Oh, I don't think I could. It sounds so very familiar. It never comes to me easily to call people by their Christian names. It does to you, lucky person!"

"Not easily," I said, "except in the cases of those I like very much," and I smiled. I never again called Miss Trant "Cordelia," but once, and that was in writing. I tried to. I went out on to the common and practised. I called "Cor-de-lia!" over and over again. It came quite easily. The birds, in time, would even answer back. But to Cordelia's good, honest face I could never do it. I think it was a greater shock than I knew when she rose from behind that bush. But we remained great friends.

Being such friends was perhaps what made me feel so acutely for her in the very painful episode that followed closely on my calling her "Cordelia."

Probably old Mrs. Wiles had been passing under the garden wall at the time, had heard me call "Cordelia," and naturally held me responsible for my friend's morals.

I went to see Mrs. Wiles and we began to talk of Mr. Bayes, which of course was quite natural, as he is the object of great interest in the village and the subject of much speculation.

"It's a pity he's not married, beggin' your pardon, ma'am," said Mrs. Wiles, pursing up her lips and picking up the kettle-holder prior to moving the kettle to the other side of the hob. "It's a pity."

"And yet —" I said.

"There's no 'yet' that I can see, beggin' your pardon; there's no other thing to be said. There's Miss Trant —"

"Yes," I said eagerly. Did Mrs. Wiles see what an excellent wife Miss Trant would make Mr. Bayes, notwithstanding a slight disparity of age on the wrong side.

"They say . . . as she's his mistress," said the old woman, and she shook her head.

The blood surged to my brain and ebbed away, leaving me cold and sick. My heart throbbed for Cordelia. It burst the bonds of ordinary friendship and I felt that to give my life for her would be but a small sacrifice to save her this sorrow — this horrible, horrible sorrow.

"Mrs. Wiles!" I said; then remembered that I must be prudent. This was a case where I might possibly make things worse. I must consult Christopher. "Mrs. Wiles!"

"Ma'am?"

"I must go!"

"Yes, ma'am." She bore the announcement heroically, her eye on the kettle.

It was horrible. I went through the village with my eyes on the ground, afraid of meeting Mr. Bayes, still more afraid of meeting poor, poor Cordelia. And Christopher had only lately put a new roof on Mrs. Wiles's cottage. It was a new heart she needed.

The first thing I did on getting home was to write to Cordelia. It was difficult to know what to say, but at any moment something of this cruel gossip might reach her ears. She must know she had a friend to stand by her.

"Dear, dear Cordelia," I wrote, "will you always remember that whatever happens — whatever is said — I am always your friend? Any trouble you have is mine — anything you may choose to confide will remain my secret and yours, dear, dear Cordelia."

I felt it to be a perfectly safe letter. I did not say to what I alluded, so that if it should fall into other hands than hers no harm would be done.

I determined not to say anything to Christopher. He was in one of his teasing moods and would not have approached the subject with the gravity the situation demanded. He loves to tease and I to smile. Under these conditions I could not have smiled.

We were at tea when Mr. Bayes was announced.

"This is delightful," he said, sitting down and drawing his long legs out of harm's way.

"Still more delightful," he said, when Ashbee reappeared with a larger-sized pot of blackberry jelly and put it down within reach of Mr. Bayes. It was a tribute, and one not to be despised, nor lightly held.

"I have just come from old Mrs. Wiles," said Mr. Bayes.

I grew crimson. I felt Christopher's eyes upon me. There was a twinkle in them I could not meet. I handed Mr. Bayes a cup of tea and my hand wobbled.

"Mrs. Wiles," went on Mr. Bayes mercilessly, looking very serious, "brings a terrible accusation against me." He stirred his tea slowly. From crimson I went deadly white.

Christopher withdrew his gaze to fix it on Mr. Bayes.

"Out with it, Bayes," he said, "it's encouraging to sinners to hear something against saints."

"It's a fearful thing, I hesitate to say it. I am entirely under the thumb of that most excellent Miss Trant. I am no longer my own master. It's a terrible thing, is n't it?"

He helped himself to bread and butter.

If Mr. Bayes was not his own master, then Miss Trant might certainly with perfect propriety be called his mistress. A light flooded the situation. I had misunderstood Mrs. Wiles. I had left the cottage hurriedly; I had put a horrible interpretation on perfectly innocent words and I had written to Cordelia! I had alluded to terrible things. I could drink no tea; a lump in my throat prevented. The twinkle in Christopher's eye went out and was replaced by a look of the deepest concern.

"Here, Priscilla," he said. He went to the window.

"What?" I said, joining him. He pointed to some imaginary thing on the lawn and slipping his arm through mine said, "What is it?"

"Nothing," I said; I smiled.

He looked at me. "Honest injin?"

I smiled again and we went back to the tea-table.

Meanwhile Mr. Bayes had been eating bread and butter thickly spread with blackberry jelly.

"Why do you always have such delicious teas?" he said. "Why, do you realise, Mrs. Jerrold, that the larger half of man is boy?"

"And the better half woman?" I asked.

"Undoubtedly," he said; "that most women realise, but all don't see the boy in the man."

The worst was to come. It came in the evening, in the shape of a letter from Miss Trant, delivered by hand. I wondered if the little moth had fluttered through the grey twilight. I opened the letter.

Dear Friend — it began — What makes you so understanding? How did you guess what is unknown to everyone, at least I thought so. I suppose it had to be. Why should there be three unhappy when one at least could be contented? That it is unselfishness in the highest form, the acme of self-abnegation on his part, I know. Is it a sin to think what might have been, with a capital M? Surely not, if it comforts in the dark watches of the night! Dear, kind, understanding heart — thank you! We can never be ordinary friends again. Did you see it in the paper?

Yours ever cordially,

CORDELIA.

Christopher put out his hand for the letter, a habit of his that is fast becoming automatic.

"It's not for you, darling, it's from Miss Trant."

"Cordelia up to mischief; I hope not!"

Whether he hoped it or not the possibility of it seemed to amuse him.

The next day, as an act of reparation, I sent a chocolate pudding to Mrs. Wiles. She loves chocolate pudding. I sent the kitchen-maid with it, and the ingredients for the sauce so that it should be quite fresh. Christopher thought that unnecessary. But then he did n't know I owed more to Mrs. Wiles than I could ever repay in sauce.

I sought to evade Cordelia, no doubt as assiduously as she sought me. We met as we were bound to meet and we sat on a stile, hand in hand, in silence.

Is there a social guide that tells when one may with perfect kindness and understanding leave go?

When we had been sitting for some time, Cordelia whispered, "You are such a help! D' you suppose *he* knows?"

I had not the remotest idea to whom the "he" referred, but I had to say something — to appear understanding.

"I am sure he knows everything," I said; "of that I am sure."

"Oh, yes, dear, *He* does — that is what makes life possible; — not a sparrow!"

I looked at Cordelia perched sparrow-like on the stile. I pictured myself, — how I should look to a passer-by. I was in a difficulty somewhere between laughter and tears; I did n't know how to get out of it. Whether to laugh or to cry! Cordelia saw the tears of both in my eyes and said she loved me for them.

As she said it the absurdity of the whole situation rushed upon me and I smiled.

"That dear brave smile," she said, "how it helps!"

So soon as I could I escaped, and once behind the cover of the hedge, I flew as fast as my feet could carry me. I was longing to tell everything to Christopher. How he would laugh. I should in all probability laugh till I cried and cry till I laughed, and no one could really understand why, not having seen Cordelia and me sitting on the stile hand in hand.

A telegram lay on the hall table. I opened it and read that Christopher was detained in town and would not be back till late.

It was very late when he got back. We had so much to talk about, after our long separation, that I am afraid I forgot all about Cordelia. It was not until he had asked me if I had been lonely that I remembered how occupied I had been.

"I had something to tell you; but I'm not sure that I shall," I said.

"I knew you had, and I am in the same state of indecision."

"But you must tell me; it's different."

He shook his head and said what was the good? He looked rather mysteriously worried.

"That," I thought, "is what comes of going to London." He had heard something of the wickedness that goes on there.

"How did you know I had something to tell you?" I asked.

"Because when your eyes look preternaturally big and you look rather — how shall I put it? — nice? it generally means that your heart is aching for somebody and it never aches without dire results."

I ignored that. "And what is troubling yours, my most wise, prudent, and deliberate Christopher?"

"Well, I saw a motor drive out of the south lodge as I came past Lonedene."

"Lord Danby is away," I said.

Christopher nodded.

I asked if it could be the doctor, if any of the children could be ill?

"It was n't Marsh's car," said Christopher, puckering up his forehead.

I said I was thankful, but I did n't understand.

"I don't suppose you do, my child!"

This was too delicious! I nestled down into the bedclothes. "Go on, Christopher!"

"You look your best in bed," he said.

I said I thought most women did, and he said he did n't know. He only knew he was frightfully sleepy and must go and undress.

As I lay in bed it came upon me in a flash — Lord Danby was away — Daphne, I knew, on the plea of having a complete rest, was to be alone for a few days. She had asked me not to come up to Lonedene. But what had Christopher heard in London that had led him to put such a construction on the fact of a motor leaving the Danbys' ?

" Danby 's a bit of an ass," said Christopher before he went to sleep.

I lay awake and wondered. How could I sleep? Was there anything I could do? Was there anybody longing to be understood?

VII

THE next morning at breakfast Christopher said, "I like you in pink, Priscilla," and I smiled. "Are you happy, my pink Priscilla?"

Happy? I put down my coffee-cup — here was my chance. I flew round to Christopher's side of the table.

"My child!" he said. "Why this sudden ebullition?"

If anyone knows a question more certain to damp one's ardour than that, I should like from pure curiosity to hear it.

"Why do you ask such absurd questions?" I asked.

"To give you the chance of your life."

"Am I never to have another? D' you mind so long as I don't do it in public?"

"Danby's an ass," said Christopher. That was it. He was still thinking of the Danbys. I refused to allow myself to think about them. It seemed treachery to do so when there crept into my thoughts a little devil of doubt. I liked Lord Danby; I loved her. She seemed to me to be of all women the most beautiful, the most charming, the most distracting. I could imagine it no peaceful thing to be her husband. If Christopher left me weeding for an hour in a garden and came back at the end of the hour, he would find me still weeding. If Lord Danby left Daphne weeding and came back in an hour, the weeds would be there but no Eve weeding. She would have found an Adam and with him would be sitting under the shade of a tree and would be persuading him, with ease, that there were no weeds; that

what he saw and thought weeds were only flowers discouraged. No one had cared for them, or admired them, or understood them, so what would have been the use of their trying to be beautiful in a barren soil?

"Christopher!" I said, having returned to my place behind the coffee-pot; "why don't men in clubs talk politics?"

Christopher said, Why did I suppose they did n't? They did! To his cost, he knew it.

I told him he never came back from London without something of the world, the flesh, and the devil sticking to him. I assured him there was as much wickedness in Dell, in proportion to its size, as in London.

He said he knew that. The talk of its wickedness had reached town.

"Well, don't believe it. Who did you think the car belonged to?"

"Mercer."

"Oh," I said.

To distract Christopher's thoughts I told him about Cordelia.

"But," he said, "why in the world did you write straight off, and what the dickens did she mean when you and she were sitting on the stile?"

I told him I had no idea. But as she had no idea to what my letter alluded, although she imagined she had, it really did n't matter.

"You must be prudent, Priscilla. You are inclined to jump to conclusions. Some day you will get into a real difficulty. You are inclined to judge hastily."

I said nothing. I might have ventured the Mercer motor, but I did n't.

At this date the "Danby affair," as it became later in Dell circles, did not figure very largely in Christopher's thoughts. In a day or two he seemed to have forgotten it. What remained uppermost in his mind was a feeling of conscious superiority in the matter of managing a wife. He understood women better than Danby did. His Priscilla was perfectly happy. A woman perfectly happy reflects great credit on the husband. Unless he is all that he ought to be, as a husband, a woman has no right to proclaim herself perfectly happy. She lowers the standard. Daphne Danby could not be called entirely happy since she was clearly not contented.

Therefore as a husband Danby lacked something.

I imagine these thoughts simmered in Christopher's mind as he smoked his pipe and cast his fly over the nose of a sophisticated trout. In reviewing the Danby affair I thought him quite capable of judging Daphne as a Priscilla. There he was wrong. What would satisfy the one might satiate the other. I don't mean that Christopher would n't satisfy any woman, but unadulterated Dell and unmitigated Christopher would n't satisfy Daphne. The excitement of the first primrose of spring and the last rose of summer would pall.

Her roses must come in the winter. Her primroses at any other time than the spring. She likes asparagus in January, strawberries at Christmas, and caviare always. She likes London at various times of the year, at others Monte Carlo. Biskra meets some moods.

She likes to see everything and be seen by everyone. And why should she keep her beauty for Lonedene only? It would be unfair to the world. When she has

time, and when there is someone who can appreciate it, she invites her baby to put its arms round her neck and the close proximity of the baby's cheek to hers does not put hers to shame; it only leads the onlooker to wonder, not so much at the delicacy of the baby's skin as at the fineness of the mother's.

Cordelia Trant once asked me if I thought Lady Danby a *poseuse?*

I asked her what could possibly have put such an idea into her head? And she said she had no idea! The most extraordinary things came unbidden to her mind, that I would be surprised if I knew. And possibly shocked. "I'm not going to tell you anything, dear Mrs. Jerrold."

It was a week after Christopher had been up to town that he was fishing and I, crouching down beside him, was counting the varieties of grass within a radius of two feet, when suddenly he said, "By the way, Priscilla, that night I came back from town — you said you had something you did n't know whether you could tell me or not — you know me better now."

"A fish — look," I whispered.

"I know — I see him. What was it?"

"Only Cordelia," I whispered.

"Is that all?"

He had the fish; in a second or two it was back in the stream, a scurrying shadow.

"A good one?" said a cheery voice; it was Cordelia's.

There was no trace of embarrassment in her manner, only an extreme friendliness as she laid her hand on my shoulder. "You've left off your woollies?" she whispered.

"Ages ago," I said.

She and I shared a secret. It is not until one shares a secret with someone that one talks in whispers of woollies. A secret makes everything sacred; the smallest intimacy assumes an importance out of all proportion to its depth. What the secret was in this case I had no idea. I smiled.

"You dear, bright, hopeful thing," whispered Cordelia. "He *does* know!"

"I'm so glad," I whispered. Whether the "He" was a higher power or not, I did n't know. I went hot and cold all over. She pulled off her gauntlet glove — the kind that when new emits red dust when you clap your hands together — and disclosed a ring on her finger. It looked like an anti-rheumatic ring; whether it was or not, I, again, did n't know.

"There's no harm in my wearing that," she said, "is there?"

She twisted it round and round and said, "*He'll* never know."

The "he" was clearly of this world.

"No harm whatever," I murmured; "it might do good," I added, longing for the priceless gift of understanding. Christopher says it would take a deal to understand Cordelia, because she's so simple. She lives on nuts and fruit, perhaps that is why. She says it is cheap and delicious, and that in addition to enjoying the one and glorying in the other, she can, with perfect honesty, look into the eyes of every sheep she meets. I envy her that moral power. Christopher asked her if she had ever motored in Scotland, and she brightly said, "Never!"

"Or spent Lammas-day there?" And she said less brightly, "Never!"

Cordelia lives on nuts and buys books. It is a delightful combination. She makes most of the things she wears. This is the one statement Christopher accepts without controversy.

I could have called Cordelia "Julia" with ease. Christopher said, Why did n't I? He knows lots of men who are called by names that don't by rights belong to them, that they owe neither to their godparents in their baptism, nor to anyone else, other than the boys who were at school with them, or the wives who married them!

As Cordelia sat beside me on the bank of the river, the shadow of Mrs. Wiles hovered between us. I wondered if I ought to warn Cordelia against the danger of Mrs. Wiles's limited vocabulary? I decided rather to go and see Mrs. Wiles and tell her the meaning of the word used, as she had used it, and what it conveyed to anyone who lived and moved in a world bigger than Dell.

I tried to keep Cordelia off the subject of Lonedene as we sat talking, but she would go there. With the rest of the world she wanted to put that small portion of it to rights.

"What is the name of that man who is always with the Danbys?" she asked.

I said so many men were always there. No man had ever been there once if he had the chance of going twice.

"Dear clever thing," she said, "I mean the one who is always putting his hand up and stroking the back of his head."

I asked if any one man in particular did that?

"Yes, you know, because Mrs. Lane said it looked so deliciously soft and I thought it an unreserved thing to say."

I suggested the name of "How." But Cordelia shook her head. "When a person," she said, "resolutely refuses to mention a name that is obviously *the* name to mention, it makes one suspicious. Mercer is that name."

"Oh," I said.

Cordelia looked at me, waiting for me to speak. "You know it," she said; then added thoughtfully, "I suppose the perfection of discretion is to be discreet without showing the machinery. People who creak with discretion are obviously — I don't mean you, of course, you are absolutely discreet and understanding."

I shook my head. I was disappointed. My machinery had creaked.

Cordelia pulled a bit of grass through her fingers.

In the distance I saw Christopher crawling and I wished I were with him. "Why should I mention his name?" I said weakly.

"Because, my dear Mrs. Jerrold, it 's becoming common gossip that Mr. Mercer is in love with Lady Danby. Lord Danby is either shutting his eyes to it because he does n't want to see, or because he 's too stupid to see."

"How long is it since you played conquerors?" I asked.

"Years and years," said Cordelia, plucking a plantain and challenging me with a flourish.

"What babies we are!" she said at last.

The Danbys I hoped were forgotten. As Cordelia whipped off the head of my last poor plantain, she said, "It was best as it was in the olden days, was n't it?"

"What was the best in what days?" I asked.

"The outraged husband killed the other man. It was all simple and direct."

"But the other man often killed the outraged husband," I said.

"Lord Danby's bigger than — Oh, dear, it's a queer world!" said Cordelia, and I did not dispute it. There was nothing queerer in it than the fact that Cordelia and I shared a secret, neither of us knew what; on her finger she wore a ring, I did n't know whose, and in her eyes beamed an affection I had won under absolutely false pretences. I smiled.

VIII

THE Lanes lived in what should properly be called the Vicarage. It is the Vicarage and has been for years. It even boasts of having once been a monastery. But that Mrs. Lane ignores, not approving of either monasteries or nunneries — on principle only, as a Member of Parliament's wife; nothing personal.

She very justly says, as she is not a clergyman's wife she would rather not give tradesmen the impression that she is. Besides, politically it would be a mistake. If she were a clergyman's wife she would be the first to say so. But as she is not, she calls the house "The Gables." It has none; but that is a detail. A "Rookery" has not necessarily rooks, nor need "The Elms" boast trees of that name, nor a "Warren," rabbits. In fact the garden would be spoilt if it did. I love Mrs. Lane just for the very reason that she says, if she were a clergyman's wife she would be the first to say so. Christopher says it's explaining the obvious. Personally I love people who do that, because it's the obvious I so often fail to see. I go much further and see much deeper down than the obvious. The most un-understanding people should see that.

The first time I met Mrs. Lane was when I returned her call.

When she called upon me, I am ashamed to say I hid behind the sofa while Ashbee searched for me all over the house.

I knew exactly what kind of woman Mrs. Lane was

by the way in which she looked behind the cushions. She was very thorough and little thought I was crouching behind the sofa in an agony that she might carry her investigations too far.

When I went to call upon her I took Aunt Jolly with me.

It was Aunt Jolly who reminded me of the card-case Mrs. Lane had given me. "Dear child," she said, "when you return a call, — a newly-married call, I mean, of course, — always, if possible, take the present given you by the person on whom you are going to call. It, to begin with, makes a subject for conversation and shows nice feeling."

Aunt Jolly and I sat in Mrs. Lane's drawing-room and waited. The card-case lay on my lap — crest side up; that again was the suggestion of Aunt Jolly.

"I can't take the teapot to the Plovers," I said.

"They would hardly expect that," she said, and I smiled.

We listened to the hurried footsteps of Mrs. Lane above. I knew at any moment she might be expected. In fact, so soon as the stumping of footsteps and the shutting and opening of drawers in the room above ceased.

I was right; a final flurry of footsteps across the floor and a few seconds after the drawing-room door opened. "How delightful of you, Mrs. Jer — or is it Lady Danby?"

I did not know then that the subtlest compliment Mrs. Lane could pay any woman was to pretend to mistake her for Lady Danby.

"No, Mrs. Jerrold," I said.

"Yes, of course, our butler is deaf — it 's chronic — but not catching — three specialists and four quacks, all say the same; he's been to them all; but such a devoted servant, in spite of it — really looks to our interests."

I said how nice that was.

"Yes, very nice, very, and in a servant perhaps it's as well — a little deafness — my husband, being in politics, naturally talks of things perhaps he ought not to, and it's nice to know it'll go no further — yes!"

I had introduced Aunt Jolly; but she sat silent and awed, probably wondering why she had never heard there was any question of deafness being catching.

"Of course," said Mrs. Lane, addressing me, "you are just married. I noticed it," pointing to the card-case. "Very thoughtful of you, very — yes."

Then she turned to Aunt Jolly. "You're Mrs. Jerrold's aunt and staying with her — yes, not married — well, that probably was n't your fault." Then turning to me, "She had all the joy of a family without the trouble. She it was who brought you up?"

"Yes," I said, smiling at Aunt Jolly. I put out my hand and convulsively Aunt Jolly took it. The pressure of her hand indicated great mental discomfort.

"And you like being married?" said Mrs. Lane to me.

I said I liked it very much.

"Well, it's a change, dear, is n't it? I mean," turning to Aunt Jolly, "one moment a girl may n't walk the length of the street by herself, without a maid, I mean, and the next — yes, I often think how strange it is, and you're so young!"

I murmured, "Not so very."

"Well, you look it. We used to wonder who Mr. Jerrold would marry. Men never marry the people you expect them to, do they? Have you a satisfactory laundress?"

I said we had our own; that she had been at Dell before I was born; that I should n't dare to criticise her washing.

"Of course not, and why should you? My husband being in Parliament must have his shirts just so! They talk of the light that beats upon a throne; think of all those lights beating on all those shirt fronts! How many Members is it? I always forget. The Labour Members don't dress, do they? If they do, they change back to the red tie before they go to the House, so I've been told. You don't know? Well, I've lived in the political world a long time now and it's very interesting."

Mrs. Lane then turned to Aunt Jolly who wilted under her gaze.

I watched with great amusement the gentle diffidence of Aunt Jolly, the overwhelming cordiality of Mrs. Lane. In a very few moments Mrs. Lane had discovered that Aunt Jolly felt much more than she could ever express and Mrs. Lane, with her unfailing kindness, sought to express for Aunt Jolly what she couldn't possibly express for herself and probably did n't feel. In fact, Aunt Jolly found herself, to her amazement, discussing questions she would never have dared even to think of. How they got on to baronets and K.C.M.G.'s I don't know, but I heard Mrs. Lane say, "I suppose most people like the wife of a baronet better than — say — the wife of a K.C.M.G. — sup-

posing each of them to be of an equally charming disposition?"

"On the principle," said Aunt Jolly, mentally clutching at something, — "on the principle that the highest attracts the best in us."

"Well, dear, for some simpler reason than that, perhaps, — just human nature, say. It's wonderful what human nature does for most of us. It explains so much — it elucidates mysteries — it exonerates from blame, men and women. It brings David nearer to us — makes Solomon and his weakness and wisdom more real to us. It's man's best friend as well as his worst enemy."

To all of which Aunt Jolly said, "I suppose so."

That she was perturbed I knew. She had discussed subjects she had made a point of never even thinking about. She had given utterance to sentiments she held vulgar and snobbish. She would never dream of preferring a baronet's wife to the wife of a K.C.M.G., yet she had allowed Mrs. Lane to suppose she would. She had made, as an excuse for doing so, that part of her nature which she held in reverence only because there was in that nature so little that was good. I knew Aunt Jolly was thinking all that, and because she was thinking all that, she refused a second cup of tea, a thing she is never known, under ordinary circumstances, to do.

She implored me with a look to say good-bye. I knew for a first call I had outstayed my time; but I had found Mrs. Lane rather amusing.

Once in the carriage Aunt Jolly turned to me, sighed, and said, "I find women of that calibre very tiring,

dear. They put words into my mouth! They are, no doubt, necessary to men with careers, but give me a more — a different kind of woman."

Mrs. Lane was one to make friends easily. Aunt Jolly hoped I would not foster the acquaintance, forgetting there was Mrs. Lane to deal with. There was no denying her. "You are the Squire's wife, I know, my dear," she said to me, "but I'm the Member's, so we're much of a muchness, and being a mother I shall no doubt be able to help you in many ways, later on. Anyhow, we've got to be friends, so let's set about it in the right way. We are always in to lunch on Sundays. Why not make it a rule to step in after church?"

I murmured that we often had friends with us.

"Bring them, dear, bring them!"

From that time onward Mrs. Lane's friendship and mine made rapid progress. She treated me as one of her children. She gave me advice. She praised me when I did well and criticised me when I fell short of her expectations.

If there is a thing Christopher detests more than another it is lunching out on Sundays; but if he must lunch with the Lanes he would rather the sacrifice were made on that day than on any other, because on Sundays Mrs. Lane does not knit.

He seeks to avoid Mrs. Lane after church; but it takes more than ordinary 'cuteness to do that if she is bent on catching him.

She caught us up one day and insisted we should go back to lunch. Christopher demurred and looked imploringly at me to save him. I had no excuse ready. In that I miserably failed him.

"Of course," she said, "you'll get a better lunch at home; I know that!"

"Oh, no," said Christopher, confused.

"Then, dear Mr. Jerrold, what is simpler? Here, Roderick," she called to a boy, "bicycle to the Manor and say Mr. and Mrs. Jerrold are lunching here." Then, turning to me, she said, "Is there anything you would like kept for dinner? Any instructions to give about a cold sweet, for instance? Anything you don't want cut?"

"Oh, no," I said, "please don't bother."

"It's no trouble," she said, beaming.

Because Mrs. Lane does n't knit on Sundays, and because Christopher was wearing trousers, he sat down unafraid in the Lanes' drawing-room and stretched out his long legs. When Mrs. Lane asked him to give her the end of his tie he meekly did it, thankful that it was not his leg. He was thinking with agony, I knew, of the day she had caught him by the leg, and, while investigating the rib of his stocking, had gone off into a description of the sudden death of a near relative. Even he had felt it was not the moment to interrupt her. But he could not resist giving little hops and with each hop Mrs. Lane's grasp tightened.

At last he got free and she, in making a final and despairing grab, caught the curate by the leg. He, knowing nothing of purl and plain, naturally avoided Mrs. Lane ever afterwards; but his wife told me she was very careful to make no difference in her manner to Mrs. Lane. Which was very kind of her; Christopher says wise, too, because Mrs. Lane subscribes so handsomely to the schools.

But I don't think the curate's wife would think of that at such a time.

Christopher, having meekly given up the end of his tie, sat resigned, looking reproachfully at me.

Mrs. Lane, turning to me, said triumphantly, "It's idiot stitch!" and Christopher said, "Priscilla made it."

As we sat down to luncheon I was conscious of not having done anything for anyone for a long time. I was beginning to fear I might be losing opportunities, when across the heavily laden table was hurled this remark: "I hear Bayes is going to be married."

Here was my chance! I upset my glass of water. The water, some of it, went into the lap of the man next me and, I believe, trickled down into his boots. The rest poured over the table. It proved the distraction I had hoped. By the time the table had assumed the appearance of the mountains of the moon, as demonstrated on a raised map, we had settled down again, and Mr. Bayes was forgotten by everyone except the governess. During the rest of luncheon a flush remained in her eyebrows.

As we walked home, Christopher was almost seriously angry. He said I was carrying this business too far; that it was quite impossible I could prevent anyone from being momentarily embarrassed; that if the governess chose to be in love with Mr. Bayes she must put up with the consequences. They were inevitable and partly enjoyable. And if they *were n't*, no care on my part could ward them off. I had n't enough to occupy my mind. I was losing my natural self in this ridiculous effort to sympathise; that my voice alone, when someone said they had missed their train, was enough

to unnerve them. It shook people's nerve to be sympathised with to such an absurd extent. It made them think someone was going to die!

And so on, which was all very unlike Christopher. After all, the water had not gone into his boots, and he *was* happy. I only wanted him to realise that everyone was not so happy as he was.

He said, of course he was happy! He adored me! But that I would make many practical men perfectly miserable. *He* was n't! I must n't imagine that! But he understood me! Did he? He little knew, darling thing, that it was I who understood him. But I would n't tell him so for the world.

Married life, I think, is very like two people playing a duet on the piano. The happiness depends entirely on who puts down the pedal. For the rest of that day I gave up the pedal; but Christopher would n't put his foot on it. He was not to be appeased, so I let him alone and did not show him the note I received that evening.

It ran as follows: —

Dear, dear, kind lovely thing: I know you did it to save

Yours, lovingly and gratefully and adoringly,

DOLLY.

P.S. You are the loveliest person in the whole world, and I 'm not the only one who thinks so — so there! — it's not true, he's not!

Now, what in the world — Dolly's world — had Dolly got to do with it?

The next time I saw her she gazed at me with soft,

starry eyes and smiled as if we shared a secret. I was getting into difficulties; Christopher was right.

Dolly was sixteen. She had dimples, which are disquieting, and eyes far apart, which tend to sentimentality.

A few days later I met Mr. Bayes in the village.

"You are the very person I want," he said.

I liked that. I longed to be a person wanted.

"Well?" I said.

"Dolly Lane," he said, "tells me she'd like to do some work in the parish."

"No," I said decidedly, "she really must n't. I have very good reasons for saying so."

Excellent as were the reasons, I could n't give them.

"Don't ask me why," I said, "but I know I am right."

He said nothing and after a second or two he laughed. I asked him at what? He told me he had just come from seeing the old Stiles. "They have lately moved," he said, "from the cottage in which they lived for years into the institute; they are going to be caretakers, that you probably know. The Parts have gone into the Stiles's old cottage and have discovered a room in it that the Stiles never knew existed. Is n't that delightful? The Stiles are now searching in the village institute in hopes of finding a secret room. It 's only in the country that these things happen," mused Mr. Bayes.

"It's rather like life, is n't it?" I said.

"Is this going to be an idea for a sermon?" he asked, slipping the pencil off his watch-chain or pretending to. I laughed and shook my head.

I went on and found Mrs. Wiles standing, with arms

akimbo, outside her cottage, staring at the two upstairs windows.

"What's the matter, Mrs. Wiles?" I asked.

"It's this hidden room business, ma'am," she said. "There's a famous house in Scotland, I'm told, which has a ghosty chamber, and find that room, they could n't! So they hung a towel out of every bedroom window, havin' the towels to do it; and havin' done that they went outside, and sure enough there was a window with no towel in it. It was n't that they were short of a towel, so I'm told; so it stands by reason that it *was* the ghosty chamber. I've done the same here — and there's just two dusters in the two windows, nothing more than meets the eye."

Mrs. Wiles backed across the road and stood on the triangle of grass which separates the road in front of her cottage from the other road which goes down the village.

"However the Stiles," she said, with a gesticulation of despair, "come to be mixed up with such things beats me — with all their children, too, lettin' a good room go to waste! It holds two beds, I'm told; not that I believe all I'm told, by a long way."

Mr. Bayes was right; only in the country could these things happen.

Only in the country, too, could old Garlic live and have his delightful being. On my way home I passed his cottage and found the old man leaning over the garden paling, throwing a cheery word to any passer-by; and of these, he was thankful to say, there were a good few.

"You look very happy this morning, Garlic!" I said,

knowing just how he felt. There are mornings in my life when it is as much as I can do not to sing aloud for the very joy of living.

"So I be, ma'am, so I be; a golden weddin' does n't come every day in a man's life, so it don't; not by a long way."

Now I knew old Mrs. Garlic had been dead some time and, sobered, I said gently, "But your wife is not alive."

"So she bain't, ma'am, but *I* be!" he said, laughing heartily.

It was the best joke he had made for a long time. To my mind, of course, it was not a subject that admitted of joking; but a man to feel like that must look at life from rather a delightful point of view, certainly across a garden paling.

I gave him the only golden thing about me that would appeal to him and it appealed very strongly. He wondered what his old woman would say to his having a golden wedding. "We always promised ourselves a golden weddin'," he said, awed to solemnity.

A few days later, on just such another day as Garlic's golden wedding day, fine, bright, and beautiful, I met Cordelia Trant, who asked me breathlessly if I had heard about old Garlic?

I said, "Was n't it delightful?"

"Delightful?" she said, looking shocked. "You see the best side of everything always, I know, but to this there is really no best side. It is tragic — after keeping so sober — quite sober — since his wife died; he promised her!"

"He has n't been — ?" I asked.

She nodded. "And nobody can imagine where he

got the money. He talks of angels and golden gates —"

"Golden weddings!" I said, relieved.

"Well, weddings; just as impossible, poor old man!"

"But he did have a golden wedding," I said.

"But his wife's dead."

"Yes, I know, but he said *he* was n't, and, after all, it's a beautiful way of looking at it; to him she still lives."

"Dear Mrs. Jerrold, he can hardly think so — I wonder — because he proposed yesterday to Mrs. Wiles, and she says if he does n't look out she'll 'golden gate' him. She'll take him at his word. What a funny old woman she is!"

She was so much funnier than Cordelia knew or ever imagined, that I hastily changed the subject; but the thought that I had been the cause of old Garlic's downfall made my heart ache.

I felt it my duty to go and see him; but it was with great reluctance and greater trepidation I walked up his little garden path. I knocked at the door, not so gently as I had done at Mrs. Larkspur's, because for one thing he was deaf, for another because my mood must necessarily be as severe as I could make it.

I found the old man sitting in his chair. He was pulling at an empty pipe.

"Well," I said; Aunt Jolly had taught me to dread a drunken man above all things on earth; my voice shook in consequence. "How are you?"

"Pretty middlin', ma'am."

I was going to sit down when he stopped me. "Beggin' your pardon, not that one!"

I took the chair he indicated and was about to move

the other out of its place, when he said, "Beggin' your pardon, ma'am, let that one bide. So, now! I keep the things as she left them, she was terrible tidy. Pretty middlin', thank ye; a golden weddin' don't come more'n once in a man's life." He winked at me and took out of his pocket a red handkerchief, a corner of which was knotted. It might have been a knot tied to remind him of something; but the knot was filled by something round, and flat, and exactly the size and shape of the coin I had given him.

"You did n't spend it, Garlic?" I said, my heart beating absurdly.

"I spend it? Lor' bless you, ma'am, there's others as will do that quick enough, give 'em the chance, which old Garlic won't! There's Mother Wiles was here yesterday talkin' of weddin's and such-like, at her age!" The old man laughed. "I would n't speak about it if it were n't such a terrible good joke! I told Miss Trant — she likes a joke! She comes and reads the Bible to me, she does, so I must have my little joke to help her along. She's a gay young spark, she is!"

Here was a joke which Cordelia might fail to see, but which I loved and longed to tell Christopher. The thought of Christopher brought home to me the loneliness of this dear old man.

"Are n't you lonely, Garlic?" I said. "Would n't you like to have someone to live with you?"

"Lonely?" he said. "Come to think on't, I don't know as how I am! You don't live with your old woman fifty years without feelin' she's there, albeit she has gone on, to show the way as it were. She was always the one to taste a new pudden first — venturesome-

like, she was! I just see her as I always did — doin' this and that — just the same things every day — ploddin', she was. I looks round sometimes thinkin' she's there, and it's only the old clock grumblin', as it always did. My old woman would n't have rested till she'd had this," he said slyly, holding up the corner of the handkerchief and rapping its contents gently against the table. "I'd have given it to her, for sure, I would!"

He put the handkerchief back into his pocket, laughing all the time, and patted the pocket. "I see'd the master this morning; I see'd both of 'ee yesterday. I like to see 'ee two muddlin' about together. Maybe 'e'll have a golden weddin' one of these days. Mr. Bayes, he's promised me terbacker for my golden weddin', he has."

The dear old man was bent on his golden wedding, and who knows how near to him was the spirit of his old wife!

I went straight to Cordelia and told her old Garlic had not been drunk.

She looked sceptical. "You dear, kind, understanding thing," she said. "How I wish I saw life through your spectacles. If ever I am accused of being drunk, may you be there to defend me!"

I told her Garlic had called her a gay young spark.

"And you still say he was sober?"

"Perfectly sober, and he had the money unchanged."

"What money?"

"The money I gave him for his golden wedding."

"You encourage him in his golden wedding? Dear Mrs. Jerrold!"

"Of course I do. 'You don't live fifty years with your old woman without feeling she's there, albeit she's gone on, to show the way as it were.'"

"Is that what he said?" asked Cordelia.

I nodded.

"But he *did n't* live fifty years with her!"

I smiled.

IX

IN my self-imposed mission as general sympathiser I had not so far met with that success I had looked for. I was beginning to despair when a note came from Cordelia Trant which clearly promised me ample opportunity for the exercise of that sympathy that was forever bubbling within me.

Dear Mrs. Jerrold, — she wrote, — I wish to enlist your ever-ready and silent sympathy on behalf of my niece, Joy Fortune, who is coming to stay with me perhaps for a few weeks, perhaps for a shorter period. She has a secret trouble, poor child, and she is coming to me to enjoy, so far as is possible, a quiet time, unquestioned and unhampered. I want you to silence gossiping tongues, if you should hear any giving expression to unkind suggestions. The child is suffering through no fault of her own. She is as innocent as a new-born babe of wishing to appear other than she is. She only wants to be let alone. If she should try to confide in you, — which, of course, she will do because of that look in your face, — try to ward it off. It is better she should not talk about it. She is here to forget. She is a dear girl and would, if she could, be as natural as God made her. But there comes a time in the lives of most women when deceit of a certain nature is unavoidable. She is very plucky. It is quite likely she will look happy and bright.

Yours in confidence,

CORDELIA.

Poor Joy Fortune! To have such a name and so early in life to meet with misfortune. It was clearly a case of disappointed love.

I read Cordelia's letter several times and then between the lines. Well, no more wholesome companion for a girl, under the circumstances, could be found than Cordelia. If the love affair was so hopeless as to preclude the girl from all possibility of marriage in the dim future, then she had a most excellent example of a happily unmarried woman before her. If, on the other hand, the girl gradually came to feel that some day she might grow to care for someone else, then Cordelia could help her to pass some of the intermediate time very pleasantly. It is wonderful how a quiet time alone with the flowers and birds in a garden makes one understand the troubles of others. I felt I must warn Christopher at once. In warning him there lay the danger, of course, of arousing his interest. But that in a pretty girl would, in any case, be aroused. So I told him Cordelia had a very pretty young niece coming to stay with her, who had suffered a very severe love disappointment. Whether the man had been impossible from a parents' and worldly point of view, or whether he had behaved badly, Cordelia had not said.

"Scoundrel," said Christopher, knocking the ash off the end of his cigar.

I was instantly alarmed. Here was the kind of expression against which I had been asked to wage war. I said I did n't know the circumstances of the case. He said he knew this much; the girl was unhappy through a love affair. Obviously the man had behaved badly. If he could not marry her he had no right to

lead her to believe he could. If he could marry her and did n't, then he had behaved still worse; supposing of course she cared for him, which she evidently did as she was unhappy.

I said I only imagined from what Cordelia had said that it was a love affair.

"Of course it was," said Christopher; "for what other reason should a girl seek retirement from the world, which at her age should be her playground?"

Christopher had flown in flights of imagination farther than I had. Not to be outdone I suggested she might be an actress. He scoffed at the idea of Cordelia numbering among her nieces anything so exciting.

I said, "We shall see."

"Shall we?" he said. "You will certainly see far more than there is to be seen and I shall probably see far less. When does she come? And if she is to be kept in seclusion, how am I to see her?"

I said that if Christopher wanted to see her, I had no doubt he would find a way. I said it without spite or malice. It was simply a statement of fact. If Christopher wants, in quite a nice way, to see a pretty girl, he sees her, and I don't blame him. I should hold him something less of a man if he did n't.

Miss Fortune came the following day. The village fly was ordered by Cordelia and in it she drove to meet the niece. That much I gathered from Mrs. Wiles. On my way back from seeing Mrs. Wiles I waited a moment at the cross-roads and looked at the view. It was so lovely, and in the distance I sawa crawling black object no bigger than a man's hand, and I knew it to be the fly on its return journey. So I stood and looked

at the view, and as I stood drinking in the beauty of that calm, still, summer evening, I heard a footstep behind me and turned to find Christopher, fishing-rod in hand. Now, the cross-roads was not the direct way home from the river. There was no reason why Christopher should have been near the highroad at all. At least, not more than there was that I should have gone on that particular evening to see Mrs. Wiles. So in mutual sympathy and understanding I held out my hand and Christopher took it, in the same spirit, no doubt.

"Is n't it ripping?" he said, looking out across the highroad.

Suddenly his eyes focussed on the small black object that had grown distinctly bigger since I had discovered how really beautiful the view was. "What's that?" he said, screwing up his nose.

"Jeremiah's fly, I think."

"Oh, I wonder where it has been?"

I asked him if he really did. There was a pause. Then I said, "It's been to the station to meet the niece."

"Not really?" said Christopher.

I nodded.

"I say, how jolly and blue it is," he exclaimed.

"Where?" I asked.

"Distance and all that!"

"It's coming nearer and nearer," I said.

"What is?"

"Why, the fly."

"Oh, that! Are you tired?"

I said, perhaps I was a little, and suggested sitting

down for a moment where we could see and not be seen.

"See what?" asked Christopher.

"The niece," I answered.

He laughed. "You are an understanding little person, really you are!"

"Oh, am I?" I said, with ecstasy; "how I should love you to think that."

At that moment the fly slowly passed, slowly enough for us to catch more than a glimpse of a radiantly happy, laughing, rosy face, with dancing, dark eyes.

That was all I saw. Christopher on this occasion saw more than I did. He saw the utter impossibility of that girl being disappointed in love. I asked if he meant no man *could* treat her badly, and he said he knew nothing about that. He was only certain no man *had*. But I reminded him that aunts, like doctors, are supposed to know best, and he asked, Why?

That was only a small instance of the lack of understanding I sometimes notice in Christopher. He thinks if a woman laughs she is necessarily happy. Now, I saw, at once, that this girl laughed more than was necessary. She was trying to make her aunt happy, and was feigning a light-heartedness it was quite impossible for her to feel, in Jeremiah's fly, with a hat-box on her knee.

"It's curious," said Christopher; "I have never seen that coloured hair with those eyes."

"What coloured hair?" I asked.

"Hers," he said.

I had n't noticed the colour of her hair. Christopher was quicker to see a thing than to understand it.

We talked a good deal about the niece that evening, and at last Christopher, stretching his arms above his head, said, "Suppose we talk about something else!" I expressed my entire willingness and we went on talking about the niece. Which only shows how bad it is for people to live entirely in the country. I think as we grow older — not that we are either of us very young — we shall probably feel a less keen interest in people. There is something of the child in both of us — a feeling of wanting to play with anything young that comes our way.

The next day I opened with grateful anticipation a note from Cordelia Trant.

Dear understanding thing: — She has come. She wants to see you, I know, although she has not said so. To think there was a time, before I knew you, when I waited for people to *say* what they wanted. I want her to meet you unexpectedly, as it were. Can you be walking through the village, or in your own woods, or anywhere you choose, at whatever hour you care to name, and I can be there with Joy. She is a charming girl and bears up so wonderfully. One at a time, I think, please. I mean you first and then Mr. Jerrold, perhaps after a day or two.

That, I had to break to Christopher. I wondered, as I had often wondered before, whether I was giving him that interest in life he should have; whether my companionship was sufficient for him? When I have asked him about it, he has always said we must wait until after the honeymoon is over, and when I say no honey-

moon is supposed to last three years, he says no one knows what a real honeymoon means! I like that, of course, but I feel if he were interested in big things, in politics, for instance, the advent of a niece of Cordelia Trant's would have left him untouched. He said, No. There I was wrong. He was interested in politics — Imperial politics. But that if he were Prime Minister of England and everything else rolled into one, he should still be immensely interested in pretty women. He had historical proof at his finger-ends that politics and an interest in women always go hand in hand. In fact, great men are never great unless feminine influence looms largely on their horizon.

"In a nice way, Christopher?" I said, and he said, "Of course, darling. There is no reason the influence should n't be a wife's, if she were a very clever, wise, and understanding woman. — So *you* are to see the girl first?"

I nodded, distracted by the thought of that tiresome wife who was wise, clever, and understanding; surely a very unusual combination.

I arranged the time, and the place, and the manner of my meeting with the niece, and we met neither at the time, nor in the place, nor in the manner I had arranged.

On the way to meet her and Cordelia, I went down to the river to see if Christopher was all right and not feeling too lonely or sad at being left out of this excitement.

He was fishing; at least, I imagined him to be fishing. As a matter of fact, I found him sitting on the trunk of a fallen tree showing off the contents of his

fly box to a girl who also sat on the trunk of a fallen tree — the same tree. She had an alder between her finger and thumb and Christopher was seeking its counterpart in the box in his hand. Neither he nor the girl saw me coming. I coughed.

"Hullo, Priscilla," he said, not looking up. "Here is an enthusiastic fisherwoman, Miss Fortune!"

Miss Fortune, a tall, slim, boy-like girl, with kind, brown, doggy eyes, rose and greeted me with a radiant smile. "Mr. Jerrold has been teaching me knots," she said.

I said he knew lots.

"Only one more than I do," said the girl gaily, slipping down to her seat beside Christopher. He moved up to make room for me, and I gave his arm a little squeeze to show I was glad he had met her first, wondering at the same time how he had managed it.

Miss Fortune was dressed in a cotton frock; her slim waist was neatly belted; her narrow feet were well shod; and her slender hands were brown; her nose was freckled and none the worse for that. On her head she wore a wide-brimmed hat, over the hat was tightly tied a motor veil. There was no need for a veil. The day was hot and there was no wind. She did n't look a girl who would wear anything that might be in the least uncomfortable. I liked her. In spite of the gaiety of her manner I could see a sadness underlying it all, and above everything by her eyelashes I could see she had been crying. The lashes were set in her lids not in an even fringe, but in little groups, which in a child is a sure sign of tears recently shed. My heart went out to her with a rush. She looked up under the intens-

ity of my gaze and gave me a swift little smile. Then looked down and up once more, quickly this time, questioning, a little resentfully, I thought, my preoccupation. I was sorry. I was showing what Cordelia calls the machinery.

We sat and talked, and then the girl, consulting a little watch in a brown strap on her wrist, said she must go. I asked if I might go with her as I was going down the village.

"Let me see," she said, "three o'clock, Aunt Cordelia said."

"Half-past," I ventured.

"Aunt Cordelia told *me*," she said.

"Of course, I forgot. It was something of my own I was thinking about. I'm sorry."

"I thought," said Joy gaily, "I must know best what my own aunt said in the sanctity of her own bedroom, although she seems to tell most of the village everything."

"Of course you must know," I said.

Joy went on to say she always said exactly what she thought and exactly what she meant.

"So do I," I said, "unless it hurts people or is likely to."

She admitted there was that danger; but held that people made too much fuss about the feelings of others — a decent sort of person knew another had no intention of deliberately hurting them by some unfortunate remark. "If I had been engaged to a sailor, for instance, and he had been drowned, I should n't be hurt if someone told me years afterwards about a cure for sea-sickness. Well, Aunt Cordelia can't see that! I should n't

think it was meant. Of course I should n't!" she said, striding along. "So be perfectly natural with me, please. Mention anything in the world you like."

There was nothing I wanted to mention; or could mention. I should like to have asked how she had found Christopher, but I could n't do that. I felt I should never understand this young woman. It was quite evident she was not engaged to, nor had she been jilted by, a sailor. There remained, of course, soldiers, barristers, Members of Parliament, members of the Stock Exchange, and others, probably capable — some of them — of dastardly conduct, but not towards this happy, boyish girl. I asked her what interested her.

"I could more easily tell you what does n't!" she said.

"Well, what?" I asked.

"The Norfolk Broads are about the only things I can think of at present."

Then it struck me it might be a sailor. Water she evidently disliked. I was puzzled. "I think," I said, "people are so interesting."

Joy laughed.

"I long to understand them," I added.

"There is n't a person in the whole world I can claim to understand — not one — not even Cordelia, aunt that she is, and sister own to my ridiculous father."

I asked, "Why ridiculous?"

"Because he 's just like Aunt Cordelia — Cordelia in trousers — but without her masculine qualities."

I expressed surprise at Cordelia being thought masculine, and Joy said she meant in all the qualities that

make men superior to women; the qualities that make for friendship. By friendship, she said, she meant going through thick and thin, through fire and water.

It was quite clear that if a man had treated her badly she owed men, as a class, no grudge. "You like men?" I asked.

She stopped. We were at a stile. She placed a foot on the stile. "I do not like women," she said, throwing her leg over, "except of course a few. I like you. I shall, I know. Shall I tell you something?"

The temptation was immense. I was on the brink of a discovery, but I remembered Cordelia's entreaty that I should dissuade the girl from confiding her sorrow to me. "Not now," I said gently; "is n't it best to forget sometimes?"

She tossed her head, as much as to say she was n't going to give away what was n't wanted, and we walked on in silence. Then she said, "I wonder where I was to meet Aunt Cordelia."

I knew intimately the very spot, but it was impossible I could tell her so. We were going away from it at every step.

"This way, I am sure," she suggested.

"She generally goes this way," I said, stopping and pointing in the opposite direction.

"While I am with her, her feet shall lead her in paths unknown. D' you sing?"

"A little."

"Let's sing."

I shook my head. "You!"

Joy threw her head back and sang just as a bird sings, because it can't help itself. Her young voice rang

out true and clear and the wood was full of the sound of music. "I love it," she exclaimed.

"So do I."

"D' you know you're very pretty," she said, so suddenly that I jumped. "I told you I should always say just what I liked. How long had Mr. Jerrold known you when he proposed?"

I grew pinker and pinker.

"Don't be shy," she said.

So I took courage and I told this strange girl how Christopher had come to our village, how he had seen me in church, and had vowed, vain man that he was, to marry me within six months in that very church.

"Good scheme," murmured Joy. "I like that. And you cared straightway or did it grow — the feeling — stronger and stronger?"

I said I had cared straightway; but I had not even owned it to myself because Aunt Jolly, who thinks love at first sight should be discouraged, would have been shocked.

She wanted to know who Aunt Jolly was and when I told her she said that was where I got it from. I asked, What from?

"Just everything; your outlook on life generally. When I met the man I shall marry —"

"You *will* marry?" I said, rejoiced.

"The man I *shall* marry," she repeated.

I asked her if she had known at once.

"That great joy was denied me," she said sorrowfully.

"But you *will?*" I said hopefully.

She nodded with entire certainty.

"When?" I asked, relieved.

"When it grows," she replied, growing as pink as I had felt the moment before.

By this time we had walked some miles and were very late when, at the appointed place, we found Cordelia waiting, knitting in hand.

"I want," she murmured, "wool over needle slip one, knit — to introduce to you my niece, Joy."

I said we had met.

"My dear," she said to Joy, "I told you to leave the farm on your left."

"Has anyone taken it?" asked Joy.

"Silly child," she said, but pleased that Joy should make such a good fight before a stranger. "Anyway, you know each other now?"

"From your description I should have known Mrs. Jerrold anywhere, even if I had n't seen her, the day I arrived, sitting behind a may tree. 'Oh! that we two were maying!'" she sang.

And Cordelia reminded her she was near the village.

I had news for Christopher. It was my object in life to give it to him as soon as possible.

"It is this, Christopher!" I said. "I understand!"

He asked me if I was sure I understood. Was not my understanding of that nature that was better described as "jumping to conclusions?"

I slipped down on to the floor and with my head against his knee I told him all about Joy and her love affair. That she cared for a man; but was not sure she cared enough.

He wondered how she knew. I said, "Intuitively, of course."

I told him she was going to commune with her own heart. In the quiet country her love would grow. She would find out the strength, and the depth of her feelings, and Christopher nodded, as much as to say, the country at this time of year gave ample opportunity for that.

I saw very little of Joy; but there was romance in the air. Cordelia explained that Joy's mornings were spent in quiet, secluded places away from all the bustle and excitement of Dell.

"It is alone with nature," I said thoughtfully, "that things grow."

Cordelia said it took time, and I nodded. We felt the sacredness of it all too deeply to pursue the subject. There was something, to me, very beautiful in the idea of this young, pure, lovely, breezy girl communing with her own heart as to whether her love was strong enough for the man who sought it. She looked a child of the woods with her brown eyes, her lithe young limbs, and her — curiously enough I did not know what her hair was like. She came to lunch and tea twice, but resolutely refused to dine. If I had not understood what she felt I would have asked her what she did in those long hours heart to heart with nature.

I feel nearest to God when, on a summer's evening, I kneel beside Christopher in our little church, with its doors wide open to the song of the birds and the hum of the bees. I feel nearest to God when old Sarah Hawthorn, in the pew in front of us, bows her head and beseeches God to have mercy upon her. Tears come to my eyes because I know how infinitely merciful He will be towards her. So I dry my tears and Sarah's blurred

shawl becomes its black-and-white shepherd's plaid self again, and I look at Christopher and I smile; and he smiles at me, and I know he is thinking, as I am, that it is the old who show us the way to Heaven, and that he knows, as I know, that it is our love for each other that binds us to earth.

Joy in the village made us very sentimental. Even Mr. Bayes began to follow her movements with smiling eyes. He, too, saw in her a child of the woods; a child learning her lesson at the feet of nature.

"She is curiously fresh and delightful," he said. "I wonder if she will be happy?"

I saw something akin to sadness in his smile and I felt it my duty to warn him that the heart of Joy might capitulate at any moment to the besieger. This was not a breach of confidence on my part, because no one had told me anything. I had seen it all for myself. Mr. Bayes might have done the same — if he had understood.

"Yes, is n't she delightful?" I said. We were sitting out on the lawn after tea; at a little distance from us Christopher and Joy were practising casting. Joy threw a very pretty line and Christopher loved telling her so. In pacing the distance he shortened his stride.

"She is curiously young," said Mr. Bayes, "and untouched by the world. I fancy worldly things would have little weight with her."

I said I thought that was what was troubling her.

"Troubling her?" he said, with that challenging look that leaps to the eyes of a chivalrous man when fate dares to deny supreme happiness to the woman who deserves, at least, that at her hands.

"I imagine she can't make up her mind if she cares enough about someone."

Mr. Bayes uncrossed and recrossed his legs, impatiently, I thought, and said he was surprised to hear that, and he frowned and continued to frown.

"I thought she was a girl to know her own mind," he said.

I said I could only admire her for not being satisfied.

"You have surprised me very much, Mrs. Jerrold," and he got up and walked away to join Christopher and Joy. It seemed to me he stood looking at Joy with unnecessary earnestness and she flushed under his gaze, and handed her rod to him, which caused Christopher to lay his down on the grass.

Joy said good-bye. Christopher and Mr. Bayes walked off together, and I was left alone; but not for long.

Cordelia Trant walked across the lawn. "Joy here?" she asked.

I said she had just gone.

"It's growing," said Cordelia, as she sank down into a chair, with a sigh of relief.

I said I was so glad. Was Joy glad?

"Joy? Of course! What girl would n't be?"

"She knows her own mind now?" I ventured.

"In what way? I never knew her when she did n't."

"I mean, the country has done it."

"There was nothing to do to her mind, poor child. It was her head. There was just the question whether it would grow or not. The doctor said, yes, and it's made a start."

I looked vaguely at Cordelia.

"I don't understand," I said.

"Only measles. She spent all she could afford on a thing, I forget what you call it, and it did n't match, so she came away to the country. Best thing she could do. She's a pretty child."

"Very," I said. "But why is her name Fortune if she is your brother's child?" I had to say something.

"She is n't. He married a widow, one Madrigal Fortune — such a name! — and this was her child. He hates to be reminded of it; he is so fond of her."

I was very much distressed. Instead of understanding I appeared to be the densest person in the world. Why had Cordelia made such a mystery? — written such an ambiguously worded letter? I was always getting into trouble. That evening it came in the form of a letter from Mr. Bayes.

Dear Mrs. Jerrold, —

Forgive me for troubling you. You have troubled me very much. If what you say about Joy is true, if she is undecided about her engagement, she breaks the heart of the finest young man I know. I have known him since he was a boy. There is no man in the world to whom I would rather give a sister or daughter. He worships the ground she walks on. I don't use the word figuratively; I mean it. He is a knight of old in the guise of a particularly healthy modern young man. I cannot imagine what can have made her change her mind. Can you, without breach of confidence, lighten my darkness? I may in some way or other be able to save the boy at least the awful shock. — Yours,

G. B.

I did the only thing I could do, I laid the letter before Christopher. He begged me not to cry. To begin with, it did no good and made him miserable. "Darling," he said, "if you would try to understand a little less, you would understand so much more. You paralyse your brain with these efforts. Did n't I tell you her hair did n't go with her eyes?"

If that comforted him it was no comfort to me.

I ordered the motor and drove to Cordelia's cottage.

I asked the little maid to ask Miss Fortune if she would see me for a minute. The little maid went upstairs and came down to say Miss Fortune was in bed; would I count ten and then go up? I counted one hundred and ten and went up, and in a little pink-and-white room, with roses peeping in at the window, I found Joy in a little pink-and-white bed.

"You?" she said; "sit down," patting the place where I was to sit.

I sat on the bed; Joy sat up in bed, with her arms clasped round her knees, her bright, eager face questioning me.

I told her I was so unhappy. I could n't sleep until I knew if she cared enough for the young man she had told me about.

"Did I tell you about him? How sympathetic you are. Do you really want to know? I thought you rather rang off when I tried to tell you."

"Please!" I said.

"Well!" she said, "I love him with the whole of my being, my heart, body, and soul. With every breath I breathe! The sun, the moon, the stars are as nothing, they are dull, dim, dark! My world is his, his mine.

To the uttermost ends of it he cannot escape me. At nights I dream that, in a far-away country, we paddle, he and I, in a canoe, just we two alone, beneath the stars. We glide in and out of creeks; we land at night; we sleep beneath the moon, on beds of scented pine needles. As I lie awake the stems of fir trees above and around me become the pillars of a vast cathedral. Sometimes I dream that we cross sandy deserts, he and I alone, under the burning sun. Across wide plains we ride, he silent and stern, with his eyes on the horizon, the pioneer looking to new worlds. While he makes countries, I shall make homes."

Joy with her eyes alight with enthusiasm carried me over those sandy deserts — across those plains — into those creeks, and when she said in a voice that thrilled, "Is that love?" I said I was sure it was, and why did they wait? She would n't get worse — I meant more in love.

"Because he must love me for what I am, not for what I seem. There must be no secrets between us." She turned round and thumping her pillow said, "Wretched measles! It came down to there." She pointed to below her waist, and I understood that much, if nothing else.

Sobered I went home and on the way I called to see Mr. Bayes. I found him sitting in his garden in the still, cool, scented evening.

He was smoking a pipe. It struck me how lonely he was. But I killed the thought in my heart. I stifled my pity. "It's all right!" I said. "She does care. It was my mistake," and leaving him bewildered I ran away, and jumping into the motor, said, "Home."

"She *does* care," I said, bursting into the smoking-room.

"Much?" asked Christopher with his eyes on his book.

"Wonderfully," I answered.

"I thought she did," he said. "Lucky young man," he added, his eyes still on his book.

"There's lots to tell you," I said.

Resigned, he laid his book face downwards on his knee.

"Must you tell me now, darling?" he asked. "I've just got to the most frightfully exciting part."

I went to bed, a little afraid of those creeky canoes, those burning deserts, those vast plains! Christopher looked so comfortable with his eyes, not on the horizon, but on his book. My love had no chance other than to leave him alone when he got to the most exciting part. That much, awake, I could do. Asleep there might be no limit to the geographical expressions of my love.

That night we slept in a wood which, to my immense relief, became, at will, a vast cathedral. I heard music such as Joy had never even dreamed of dreaming. I paddled, in my dreams, with Christopher, not in canoes, but at Margate; but what matter so long as we paddled? Footsore and weary, but loving intensely, I followed him across sandy shores, over vast plains. I was relieved to find my love sufficient to bear the immense discomforts I endured; but awoke to a sense of disappointment in that Joy had never even dreamed of discomfort.

I put my hand to my hair, and, feeling the comforting thickness of two long plaits, tucked them away out

of sight. Even to think of them showed a want of sympathy, while to hide them showed at least a desire to understand.

"What do you suppose Joy's young man is?" I asked Christopher.

"A clerk in a Hong-Kong bank," he replied.

"What makes you think that?" I asked, knowing he must be wrong.

"Because she told me so," he said.

I said I thought she must have been making fun of me, and Christopher said he was sure she would make fun of anyone on the smallest provocation.

I was evidently not the only one to be made fun of, for the next time I met Cordelia she said, "I wish you could hear that child talk, as she talks to me. She says wonderful things about creeks and canoes and deserts and plains; I can't sleep at night, I'm so excited! It's wonderful! the child has such feeling."

I said I could see it in her face.

"What, poetry?" said Cordelia eagerly.

"No, mischief."

"How quick you are to understand," she said, sighing. "I am afraid I took it all quite seriously, and d' you know she thinks you did, too."

"I did," I said.

X

JOY'S secret I knew; I shared it with Christopher. There was comfort in that. Cordelia and I shared a secret; its nature to me unknown. Dolly Lane and I shared another, its nature vaguely guessed at by me. Old Garlic and I shared a secret known to us both. There was another known only to me which neither haunts me nor troubles me. It is the secret of the days spent with my children. Nobody knows I have any, but I have three, Richard, Priscilla, and Betty.

Days spent with them are as happy as days can be without Christopher. I do not tell him of those days because he might not understand. There are those who would find time so spent sad and unprofitable. There are those among my friends who would pity me. But they would not understand. I love those days and in them there is no sadness at all.

The day to be right must be one in early summer. Christopher must be away, enjoying himself — fishing, for choice, with a friend who wishes Richard Jerrold had never married; — then I feel no compunction in being as happy as I can.

I take a rug and I spread it under a tree; I sit on the rug; I lean against the trunk of the tree; I shut my eyes and I hold out my arms and in one moment Betty is in them, with her arms tight round my neck. I implore mercy and she hugs tighter than ever, then exhausted, she relaxes her hold and says, "Are n't I stwong, mummy?"

"You are, darling," I say, catching her round the waist; whereupon she throws herself back until her head rests in the grass between my feet. "Up you come, Betty," and up she comes.

"Bettikins?" I say.

"Um?" says Betty, looking at me through her curls.

"How much do you love mummy?"

She holds out her arms about a foot apart.

"Only that, Betty?" I say, feigning a grief I do not feel, knowing what is to follow.

Out go the arms wider and wider until they can go no farther.

"As much as that, darling?"

"Much more, weally, as much as fwom here to — evelywhere," she says looking to the summer sky to which she is indebted for the blueness of her eyes.

"How lovely!" I say, and she nods.

Betty is three years old. She is the most difficult of the children to manage; she has that which parents tolerate with pride because it passes under the name of character; which, in other words, means that there are days when it is her pleasure to do exactly what I tell her not to do. If on those days I say, —

"Betty, come!" — Betty goes.

"Betty, don't do that!" — Betty does it.

"Betty, do you love mummy?" — Betty says "Nope."

"Betty, mummy is very sad, do you hear what she says?" — Betty says, "Nope, Betty can't hear."

Those are the days on which Betty shows character.

Richard and Priscilla have always been perfectly easy to manage. I think they are twins; but I have not

quite made up my mind. I don't like to have twins without asking Christopher's permission, and since I can't ask that, I am leaving them a little vaguely defined — twins or not twins.

Richard often says, "Mummy you *do* understand me," which is of course very gratifying. If he and Priscilla are twins they are seven years old, if not twins, Richard is seven and Priscilla five.

Betty is certainly three; Christopher could have no objection to that. I hope she will remain so for many a long day to come.

Well, on a lovely summer day Betty and I sit under a beech tree and down in the meadow the other children are paddling in the trout-stream, their shoes and stockings beside me.

I tell Betty stories; I want to keep her quiet because it is so hot. There are damp little curls under, what is properly termed, her "back hair." I lift that back hair and bring it to the top of her head, arranging it in a lovely bunch of curls. She looks delicious like that. I make a daisy chain and twist it in the curls, which she likes.

"I am pwitty," she says gleefully, clasping her little hands with ecstasy. And I say she is very sweet.

"Not pwitty," she murmurs, "but welly weet." Then, jumping up, she asks, "Was he weally athleep?"

"Who?" I say, having forgotten what story I was telling.

"The lickle boy who wath tho tired." Betty lifts up her arms over her head and brings them limply down at her sides to express great tiredness.

"Oh, yes, that little boy was."

"Was there anuvver lickle boy?" she asks, surprised.

"What other little boy?"

"Anuvver lickle boy what was n't."

"That was n't what, darling?" I say, completely at sea.

"What you thaid."

"There was only one little boy," I say.

"What wath he called?"

"Dick Whittington."

"What did the puthy cat thay?"

"When, darling?"

"When the lickle boy wath, what you thay."

"Asleep."

Betty nods.

"I don't know what pussy said; the bells said —"

"Ding, dong, dell, puthy's in the well," sings Betty very sorrowfully, but quite in tune, for which I am thankful.

"Who put him there, Betty?" I say. And Betty looks very shocked and pained and she says, "Hush!" and puts her finger to her lips and I feel very uncomfortable, just as uncomfortable as real children can make a real mother feel.

And so on; everyone knows what happens and what a child says if you sit under a beech tree and tell that child a story. The moment I love best comes when, tired and sleepy, Betty creeps into my arms, and, shutting her eyes, goes fast to sleep with one arm flung out.

In her hand is tightly held a bunch of daisies and grass. Gently I lean over and, opening one by one the little fingers, I take out the damp little bunch and lay

it on the grass to cool. In removing a tiny bit of grass that sticks to the heart-line of Betty's hand I discover, to my horror, that the heart-line dominates that of the head, and I feel a cold grip of apprehension close over my own heart as I think of Betty's love affairs. Of a possible marriage that may turn out unhappily. Before I have time to dwell on these terrible possibilities Ashbee appears on the scene with the luncheon basket. Through the strap that holds it together he has slipped Betty's little white coat.

"Miss Betty sneezed yesterday, ma'am," he whispers.

Not to hurt his feelings I lay the coat gently over the sleeping child and she stirs and I hold up a warning finger to Ashbee and he steals away on tiptoe, over the grass, down to the stream, little Priscilla's shoes and stockings in one hand; in the other, little Richard's.

As I have days with my dream children, so have I nights when my dream mother comes to me. Yet she is no dream, but the joyous memory of a wonderful reality; I see her, as I used to see her when I was a child, laughing, happy, and gay. Aunt Jolly says she never grew up. It was nice to have a mother just one's own age. She played with us as another child might have played. As loudly as we clamoured for half-holidays, she clamoured, with this difference, that where we failed to get them, she succeeded; and those half-holidays! what holidays they were! Into half a day we crammed the joyousness that will last me a lifetime, as a memory. Then there came a time when mother no longer ran. We were told when we were in her room that we must be quiet. We were told that when the spring came she

would be quite well. No children watched for the first primroses more eagerly than we did. I marked off the days on a calendar, crossing them out one by one.

When the spring came it brought with it Bobbie, and the primroses, and took away with it — mother. And Aunt Jolly, so soon as she was in half-mourning, began to study cricket news and in due season football news, and to this day she does n't understand either the one or the other. But Bobbie says, "She does try jolly hard!" And in that lies her reward.

When I go to bed so happy that I must tell someone, I tell the mother who comes to me. I see her most distinctly when I close my eyes. I go to sleep knowing she is watching over me. I think what we as children were taught to call "conscience" is only another word for the voice of the mother who has gone before, speaking to the children she is watching over. The gentle voice to which even the most careless must, in time, listen, for it will not be denied.

Perhaps it is easier for the mother who has gone before, to watch over and guide her children than it is for the earthly mother, who, walking with them, side by side, herself gropes in darkness. She who has gone before stands in the light beyond, and by that light which makes clear everything — even the dark mystery of the "reason why" — she can watch the footsteps of the children she has left. And when she sees their feet wander from the path she also sees why, and knows that, in the end, they must stand with her in the light, or of what avail is love?

My dream children, and my mother, who come to me in my dreams, are my happy secrets. I don't tell

Christopher about them, because I imagine, however much one loves one's husband, there are just a few things one can't tell him, from a feeling of shyness.

Besides, he would think I was going to die, which I have no intention of doing. I feel alive to my fingertips and gloriously happy. I am old, too, to die. Where would be the romance we pictured as children? Twenty-two on a tombstone might pass unnoticed. But there was a time when "Priscilla, the dearly loved wife, aged seventeen," would almost have been worth dying for!

But to return to stern reality! There was another secret that was to prove an intolerable burden and so secret as to be understood neither by me nor by the man who shared it with me. If it had not been for that secret I should never have left Dell; certainly never have gone to London, where dear Christopher sought for me the distraction that became his.

Of course, after he first spoke to me about the Danby affair, things got worse. Love affairs that ought not to be, always do.

Whether gossip, like a snowball, gets bigger and bigger as it rolls along, I do not know. But from Cordelia's insinuations Lady Danby's behaviour became the subject of the boldest assertion.

One day Christopher was away. Like all days without him it had been rather long, and when Best said, "She's gone, ma'am," I was off my guard, and said, "Who?"

I rapidly reviewed in my mind the possibility of the kitchen-maid, the scullery-maid, or any other of the under-servants going. I was, at once, indignant for fear anyone had been misunderstood, had left under the

weight of some injustice. The kitchen-maid, I knew, had objected to whipping the cream while standing on Mrs. Wiles's doorstep. But I thought I had put that right by telling her there were many kitchen-maids who, instead of standing in a hot kitchen, would be only too thankful to whip the cream while breathing the scent of a briar hedge and at the same time feeling on their cheeks the fanning of a delicious breeze.

"Her ladyship," said Best in answer to my question.

"Her lady —!"

"Gone, it had to come."

"What had to come?"

"This," said Best. "Goings-on can't last for ever. The end comes to those who wait."

"Who told you, Best — dear Best — tell me?"

"It's common talk."

"It is; it is, indeed, in every sense of the word."

"Very well, ma'am, we won't say any more."

"But his lordship?" I said.

"He's like a madman, they say, and so he might be, left with three children —"

"Don't, Best, don't!"

"It's none of my doin'."

"Do my hair as quickly as possible."

Best can be marvellously quick if she chooses. In a minute my hair was twisted up and the pins stuck into my head.

"What will you wear, ma'am?"

I paused. Christopher was away. "Anything," I said, "I mean I won't, — yes, I will, — my white chiffon."

"It should have been pressed if I had known!" said Best.

Pressed! One woman running away, the other having her tea-gown pressed! I was terribly distressed. If what Best said was true, something must be done. She must be made to come back to her babies! — to him! It might not be too late! I could eat no dinner.

I went out into the garden and walked about miserably unhappy. What could I do? There seemed nothing I could do; no legitimate outlet for my sympathy. There was certainly Lord Danby! He was alone and miserable. It was now that he would need a woman's hand — a woman's strength to uplift him! To whom could he turn in his sorrow? He had no mother. Was it possible I might help him? It might be a comfort to him to confide. I was on the edge of the park; a little bridge spanned the sunk fence. Across a silvery sea of grass lay Lonedene. I could be there in a few moments. Unknown to anyone I might steal in and see him and discover for myself what had happened.

Across the park, as fast as I could, I ran. The long grass was heavy with dew; in a moment my skirts were soaked. I picked them up. The feeling of wet feet was delicious. It was a glorious moonlight night, a very fairyland!

I held out my hand, it was brilliantly white. I lifted my face to the sky and laughed with delight, it was so lovely; not my face, of course. Then suddenly sobered by the thought of my errand, I prayed and walked slowly, ashamed that I could have laughed.

I went in by the garden gate and stole over the lawn.

"What a heavenly night to run away," I thought, "if one wanted to run away!"

Daphne Danby undoubtedly had a soul for beauty

if she lacked other qualities desirable in women. I could imagine Cordelia running away in a fog, given a sufficiently strong incentive; Mrs. Lane by daylight, a strong, sunshiny daylight; — Mrs. Lane would remember to take sandwiches, Cordelia goloshes; — but such a night as this Daphne must have chosen. Everything on such a night as this became misty and nebulous; the jasmine, stars; the wild-roses, misty globes, hanging in a world of silver and moonbeams. It was all so beautiful that in a way the sin should have seemed worse, and yet it was so beautiful and pure that sin in any form seemed unreal. It was difficult to believe in its existence. I could n't picture Mr. Mercer by moonlight, nor did I wish to, but Daphne I could. I knew just how she would look. I could see the exquisite oval of her face, the starriness of her wonderful eyes; the radiance of her pallor. The scent of the white flowers was overpowering. The house loomed in sight — a great grey pile of buildings. I knew where Lord Danby sat in the evenings, where he would most certainly sit if his wife had run away. It would, under the circumstances, be impossible to sit either in the hall or in the big, white drawing-room. He would sit in the library — where the cushions, at least, were black satin. If the window were open, I might steal in and no one would know.

Across the lawn I crept, round by the magnolia. I put out my hand to feel one of its gleaming white flowers and I could have imagined it Daphne's cheek I touched.

The room I peered into was lit up. I saw the deep armchairs I knew so well; the sofas, the immense

writing-table, the books, the flowers. Above the line of the back of the armchair, resting on the mantelpiece, I saw Lord Danby's feet. Have I made myself clear? He was sitting in the armchair with his legs up, reading "Punch."

Would a man do that if his wife had run away?

I should have expected to see him with his face buried in his hands. The thought that so he might have been until that moment rushed upon me, and I stepped through the window.

Down came his legs, round came his head, up he jumped. "Mrs. Jerrold, is it Mrs. Jerrold?"

"Yes," I said, "I have come!"

"Daphne is not here," he said.

"This," I thought, "is the manner he has adopted. He does not want me to know anything."

As I knew Daphne was n't there, what was the use?

"No, I knew, but I could not help coming," I said.

I stopped, not knowing what to say. It was evident he meant to say nothing. I could not force his confidence — unless of course he was waiting, expecting me to force it.

Oh! for that intuition to know when to force a confidence, to know when the overburdened heart is longing for its secret to be torn from it ruthlessly with tender hands!

"I ought not to have come," I said, taking up my position by the table on which stood the photograph of his three little girls; — if I could draw his attention to that it might be a help. "But," I added, "I could n't help it. Christopher is away — no one need ever know."

He looked genuinely distressed. "No one must know," he said; "you foolish, most foolish child, you should n't have come!"

"I know, but what could I do?"

I rested my hand on the top of the photograph frame.

"My dear Mrs. Jerrold," he said, "what good could it possibly do?"

That meant of course that he was adamantine and would never forgive.

"Is it too late," I asked.

"Much too late, it's eleven o'clock; it's time you were in bed, you poor baby!"

"I don't mean that — I could n't sleep — is it too late? Is your love strong enough — dare you?"

Pains were creeping round my throat; they joined in a horrible grip just where my voice ought to have been.

Lord Danby paced up and down the room, then stopped in front of me, and taking my two hands in his, said, "You dear little Priscilla, you are such a child — you don't know what you are doing or saying! Go home and forget it all — Richard's the best husband in the world. I am, if not the best husband in the world, — a pretty good one. You've no business to do it, little woman — it's not fair — not fair."

The hideous absurdity of the situation dawned upon me.

"Lord Danby," I said. Tears choked me.

"Don't cry, my child. If there is anything wrong, tell Richard. You can't go against the world — it does n't do. It's a beastly place, the world; a suspicious thing. Convention is a tremendous safeguard! The

thing I've most liked you for is something in your face — its goodness! It was the thing that most appealed to Richard — you were a religion — a faith to him. The day he told me you were going to marry him, he said wonderful things about you. I should be afraid to repeat them, afraid to spoil them. He sat there —"

With his foot Lord Danby gave the armchair a gentle push.

"Just there. I should like to be able to speak of my love for a woman as your Richard spoke of his for you!"

"Don't!" I said.

"I must; you've got to realise what this means to him. If you are not happy, tell him — don't come to me or anyone else. Believe me, Priscilla, it's worth while keeping that faith. I don't say I'm not touched that you should look upon me as a great friend, my child; but I'm fond of old Richard, — Christopher, you call him, — and he might not understand. We were boys together and that counts for much — you understand, say you understand!"

There were voices in the hall — the gay voice of Daphne Danby, the low, quiet voice of Christopher Jerrold.

I stepped out, as I had come in, through the window and ran home as fast as I could, the hideous nightmare close at my heels, laughing in my ear.

Never could I explain to Lord Danby why I had come, because in so doing I must say I had thought his wife had run away!

He must always imagine I had come to confide in him. He had begged me to remember that the husband I adored was the best in the world!

I could never tell Christopher, because he would kill Lord Danby for thinking what he was after all bound to think.

That night there lived no woman so miserable as I was. When Christopher came in I pretended to be asleep. I had never gone to sleep without wishing him good-night. That he did not remark it surprised me; that he did not say he had brought Daphne home surprised me more. What had they been doing together? Here was my chance to show the depth of my understanding, the height of my trust.

XI

THE next morning I felt it my duty to tell Best she had made a mistake; that Lady Danby had only gone to town to shop; that Mr. Jerrold had brought her home; he had chanced to meet her.

"To shop?" said Best.

Now I knew Best at her worst, and I knew the mood she was in.

"You mean that the shops would be shut?" I suggested.

"As her ladyship left at six o'clock I should think they might; but I don't know much about London ways, nor do I wish to; the singing of birds is enough for me — and — and flowers."

I looked at Best in surprise. I had never imagined she found pleasure in such things. "You must try not to think evil of anyone, dear Best," I said gently.

There was a pause. Best, I knew, could be but crouching to spring.

"You lost a pink ribbon last night, ma'am!"

I had not the heart nor the courage to ask what ribbon; I could only wonder where Best thought I had lost it.

If I have made Best appear unsympathetic, I am sorry. Hers is a nature that seeks to disguise its softer side, as if it were a weakness of which she is ashamed. Christopher says she succeeds admirably in disguising it. He hardly believes it exists. But it does. Under the roughness of her manner, there lies a heart of gold.

She showed it a thousand times when we were children. That I am no longer a child is a truth to which she deliberately shuts her eyes. Her manner to me is largely the outcome of what seems to her to be my continual disobedience. I get my feet wet, I am late for meals, I tear my frocks, I choose my clothes, all in defiance of her plainly expressed wishes. Is it to be wondered at that Best frowns upon the most wayward of her children and feels it her duty to be stern in order that the child may not be hopelessly spoilt?

Christopher talks of getting rid of Best. I wonder how he would set about it.

I never expected to see the pink ribbon again.

Walking through the village I met Dolly Lane, carrying a very large Bible. Daphne says the admiration a young woman feels for a clergyman can be accurately gauged by the size of the Bible she carries. It is curious, she admits, but it is true.

As I walked beside Dolly she shyly opened the Bible and disclosed, lying between its pages, a pink ribbon.

That it belonged to me I recognised at a glance; with a rush of thankfulness I felt that Best's worst fears and direst prognostications had not been justified. "Where did you find it, Dolly?" I asked.

"Ah!" said Dolly archly. "How d' you know I found it?"

"Really, Dolly dear, I want to know."

"Well, you know where the little gate leads into Lonedene?"

"Yes, yes, of course."

"Well, it was n't there."

I breathed again.

"It was just beyond, on the park paling, a few yards down."

"But" — I said. I was going on to say that I had turned into Lonedene before that point, and remembered I could not do so without committing myself.

"Yes, it was there because I found it. D' you know where it came from?"

"Tell me," I said.

"It tied up a box of chocolates *he* gave one of the Danby children."

Dolly tucked her Bible under her arm, and pulling the ribbon out to its full length, proceeded to roll it neatly and tightly. Then did as most girls would have done, formed a little pyramid of it by forcing up the middle of the roll with her little finger. "Imagine throwing away a bit of ribbon *he* gave!" she said, and sighed.

Now I was quite certain the pink ribbon had never tied up a box of chocolates; that it had in no possible way been connected with him. But to this day no doubt that ribbon is treasured by Dolly and will only be thrown away, as a duty, when she meets the right man, when all ribbons must be thrown away and all treasures discarded.

"You look thin, darling," said Christopher, one day.

No wonder! My days were passed in terror of meeting Lord Danby, and I began to feel a deep resentment against Daphne Danby for not having run away as she ought to have done.

Moreover, I realised that to sympathise is not so easy as it seems, nor so safe.

I smiled as usual, but somehow or other my smile

had lost its convincing radiance, and Christopher was worried.

I always read his letters, if they lie open on the table, just as he would read mine, if he cared to.

One morning a very long letter lay on his table. Seeing it was from old Mr. Grant, whom I love very nearly as much as he loves Christopher, I read it: —

Dear Richard, —

I doubt if there is anyone, beyond yourself, who more appreciates than I do, your Prudent Priscilla. It is not, by the way, her prudence that most appeals to me. To me she seems of all women the most satisfying. Don't worry about perpetuating Priscilla. It will all come in good time. Let her give freely of her smiles. Hers is a nature that must give. I can see her busying herself in the spring, helping the birds, that can't build, to build — such nests! There is a Persian proverb — it has its prototypes in all languages, no doubt; — but the Persian version most appeals to an admirer of Priscilla. 'God builds the nest of the blind bird.' He may do it, employing Priscilla as architect. I love her smile. Don't you find it pleasant? She is one of the few women who, without a baby of her own, can love another woman's; let her!

It is a good thing that I am an old man and have buried most of my heart with my own Priscilla. I think old men, when they wag their grey heads and talk of the good old days, think only of the woman who loved them best. Take the modern Priscilla abroad if the village tragedies weigh upon her; but for Heaven's sake avoid those sunny climes where the natives ill-

treat their donkeys. There can be no peace there for Priscillas.

Perpetuating Priscilla, so *that* was what Christopher thought! I looked up in the dictionary, "perpetuate," — "to preserve from extinction."

So that was what Christopher thought I was fretting about!

How I wished it were! It would be a feeling entirely honourable; but to go about as I did in terror of meeting one man was a feeling too horrible. I spent most of my time weeding, which I happen to dislike; but the garden was the only place in which I felt fairly safe.

One day, without any warning, Christopher told me he was going to take me to London.

I smiled. "What train?" I asked.

"Any train you like," he answered.

This showed him to be in the mood in which I best like him to be.

It falls gently upon him when he is smoking. He draws contentedly at his pipe and smiles at me with his eyes. The smile holds a certain tenderness in its quizzicality — if there be such a word — and he imagines he is about to humour Priscilla. I know by just the same smile that Priscilla is certainly about to humour him — which of course comes to the same thing.

"Which train?" I said.

"That's for you to say."

"But there's no choice; it's no use going up for the day by a late train."

Then Christopher took his pipe out of his mouth and

out of the pipe knocked the ashes, and then said he did not propose going for the day.

"For several days?" I asked.

"For several weeks, Priscilla," he answered solemnly.

"London?"

"London." There was a finality in the word.

I asked him if he realised that London meant stiff collars and stiff shirts?

He laid on my gesticulating hand a restraining one, and said, not necessarily stiff shirts. He had seen Danby the other day, on his way back from town, in a soft blue shirt.

"Fast?" I asked, thinking of laundresses, naturally.

"No, why? Danby's not that, much as he would like us to think he is — poor old Danby!"

I said I meant a fast dye.

"And a black tie," said Christopher.

I went on to say that I had meant, more than anything, stiff manners, and stiff people.

Christopher said, on the contrary, it was rather the other way.

I gently drew his vagrant thoughts to patent-leather boots, hot pavements, then to lawns dappled with sunshine and shadow.

"Think," I said, "of the strawberries from their beds warm and sweet — the squashy gooseberries — roses everywhere, and birds — the smell of hay — you love that, Christopher! Cool, lovely evenings. Think of our drives together through dark, mysterious, sweet-scented lanes — think of our drives into the dawn; from darkness into the dawn of day, from the dim, dim dawn into the arms of the sun."

"With due allowance for poetical licence! But driving up Piccadilly into the dawn has a fascination of its own."

He went on to say that it was good for me to see something of life. He had been selfish in hiding me away in the country, at my age. I felt the sting of tears in my eyes and a disagreeable warmth in my nose. I turned away so that he should see neither.

"Where are you going to take a house?" I asked.

He had a list. He had marked those houses he thought likely. In no single case did I agree with him. "I know what I should like," I said, I imagine rather plaintively.

"What?"

"One of those darlings in Chelsea."

"No, Priscilla, nor one of the angels in Westminster. You've got to be as worldly as possible — no art pottery, no whitewash, no quaintnesses, — just as mondaine as Ashbee can desire. Satin brocade walls —!"

"Not the tiara?" I said, clasping my head.

"Yes, in all probability, the tiara; you must be prepared for the worst!"

We took a house and I broke the news to the servants.

They all bore up under the shock except the kitchen-maid, who could n't leave William, much as she would try to, she had n't the heart! So she stayed behind to help with the jam and I set about to find another kitchen-maid — or, to be exact a scullery-maid, the existing scullery-maid moving up.

I found a girl in the neighbourhood who was docile and willing to do all I asked. Our interview at an end,

she summoned up her courage and said, "Please, ma'am, I can't undertake to groom the horses."

Christopher loved that and so did I. To show how little of a social success I was in London I told that story, one night dining out, to a charming elderly lady who seemed interested in servants. She had told me several stories about servants that were n't in the least amusing, so I told her this one. She looked at me and à propos of nothing said her husband was a commissioner in lunacy. But I am anticipating. So was she.

XII

BEST hates cab-runners. The feeling is instinctive. In vain have I striven to implant the seeds of kindness to cab-runners in the barren breast of Best. She hates them and there the matter ends, or from her point of view should end.

The moment she set foot in London, she was on the lookout for her enemy. I suggested we should take a taxi-cab, because there are few cab-runners who attempt to follow a motor. But Best did n't hold with taxis.

Directly we got into the cab her head was out of it. The shop windows served her as mirrors. In one she suddenly saw the reflection of a man, running. "We don't want a man," she called; "we've got a man of our own." I wondered how Ashbee would like to be so described, and by Best.

The man accosted looked surprised, and he had reason to be, for he was, in all probability, a director of the Bank of England.

"Well," said Best, undefeated, "he won't know me again, and it's best to be on the safe side of things."

It is an excellent thing to be on the safe side of a director of the Bank of England. They are themselves proverbially on the safe side.

"Besides," said Best, "it never does any man harm to hear he's not wanted — it's news to most of them, more's the pity."

Ashbee had gained in seriousness of manner. Twenty-

four hours in London had added weight to his dignity. It showed itself in the pained manner with which he relieved me of my umbrella. James, the footman, had been dismissed by Ashbee because his manner was not fitted to London. His place was taken by another James — three inches taller and two or three inches narrower. If Ashbee had had his way I should have stayed at Dell. Most willingly would I have stayed there on board wages.

I learned two or three things in London in the space of as many hours. One was that, of clothes, in the accepted sense of the word, I had none.

The day after we arrived when I was wandering up and down stairs wondering what to do with myself, Best came and told me that up the speaking-tube had come the message that her ladyship was in the drawing-room. Whether news conveyed in that manner was to be relied upon or not, she did n't know.

"Whose ladyship?" I said, knowing it was no use putting on airs with Best. I knew it was Lady Danby and Best knew I knew it could be no one else.

"Well, my little Puritan Priscilla," said Daphne, when I went into the drawing-room, "what looks charming at Dell I imagine will sink into insignificance in town. Well, I don't know! It has a little quaintness of its own. Richard, dear man, has placed you body and soul in my hands. Come along and shop for the good of both, to the detriment only of your purse and Richard's."

We were about to start,— in fact Daphne was already in the motor, — when the telephone bell rang. It was a terror new to me. I took up the receiver. "Left

hand, ma'am," said Ashbee in an undertone. Obediently I took it in my left hand. "Clear but not raised, ma'am," murmured Ashbee, evidently referring to my voice.

"Please be quiet, Ashbee — yes, darling," this to Christopher, of course.

"If Daphne should call, don't go out with her."

"Christopher —" I said. Nothing happened! Ashbee said we were cut off.

"Come on!" called Daphne.

"I'm afraid," I said, one foot on the step of the car, "I've got a pain — I'm not sure."

"Where have you the pain? Then it can't be bad — get in."

Off we glided. We said nothing. Daphne no doubt was wondering how she should summon up sufficient courage to take me in to a smart dressmaker's, while I was glorying in the fact that she was wearing one of the new veils. A spray of flowers went across her face, one petal obliterating her nose, another an eye. It was therefore quite possible no one would recognise her, and that in the spirit I should be obeying Christopher, although in the letter of the law, I transgressed.

As we left the dressmaker's and I got into the car, Daphne said, "You wear a starched petticoat!"

"Of course," I said. "Don't you?"

"You *are* funny — as Baby says. What d' you feel like, Priscilla? Is it curious to feel simple and good and truthful and honest and starchy and crackly and devoted to Christopher, of course?"

"Of course."

"Does he like starched white petticoats?"

"I never asked him."

"You don't know him well enough. He's a dear!"

"I know," I said, feeling a little alarmed.

"You like Danby, don't you?"

"Of course I do," I said, getting crimson.

"He thinks so," said Daphne.

"Thinks what?" I asked.

She laughed. "Does Best do your hair?"

I said she did.

"Is it all your own? — or does she allow additions?"

I said she would certainly not allow anything of the kind.

"So it is your own?"

"Oh, yes," I said, feeling to make sure.

Daphne said I should be a beauty yet. "It's better to have a queer little face, in the right sort of way, than a pretty one in the wrong sort of way. You will be plain or beautiful. You will be spared being called pretty."

Daphne suggested we should lunch somewhere. I hesitated. It depended on the veil.

With deep cunning I said, "Best can't put on a veil as yours is tied."

"She must learn," said Daphne.

"Can you eat in it?" I asked.

"No, of course not."

Lunch, then, at a restaurant was impossible. To justify my interest in the veil I asked its price.

"How much?" said Daphne. "I think it was four guineas; but I forget. I have one you shall have for two. It has just come from Paris, quite as pretty as this — if not so useful; I'll send it round."

My heart stood still. I seldom wore a veil. To give

two guineas for a thing I should never put on! What would Best say?

"Now, lunch; where?" said Daphne.

I said I had forgotten I had someone lunching with me. She looked surprised and said she would come, too. She would drop me and come back. She dropped me at our door in Cadogan Square.

I went into the house feeling very crushed and miserable. Who could have felt otherwise knowing that by no possible means could the necessary guest be procured? There must be few young women in London placed as I was. Most of them have some willing guest with an ear at the other end of the telephone.

"There's a young man in the drawing-room, ma'am," said Ashbee.

I asked what sort of a young man?

Ashbee said nowadays it was impossible to say.

On the hall table lay a card. I took it up. "Mr. May" was the name on it. My heart went out to him with a rush, a rush of gratitude. Mr. May, in neat lettering, proceeded beneath his name to set forth the advantages of getting eggs and butter straight from the country. He had undoubted facilities for supplying the same; his cows had superior methods, his hens untiring energy. This was quite too excellent. I did n't in the least want eggs, neither did I want butter; but a young man I wanted most dreadfully.

I ran upstairs two steps at a time, opened the door, and saw the real thing standing looking out of the window. He wheeled round. His back had not been bad; his face was better. He looked honest, if a little embarrassed.

"I am so glad you waited," I said.

He said, "Thank you."

"I should have been so sorry to miss you. Do sit down!"

He sat down. He was very sunburnt, evidently a young man from the country.

"We only came up a few days ago," I said; "only yesterday, to be exact."

He bowed — I think he did. At all events he implied that we had every right to come up on any day we chose.

"We have our own eggs up and I think our own butter, but I'm not sure."

He said he thought that an excellent plan, which was very generous of him considering it trespassed on his preserves. But he looked that. He looked nice and had probably taken to eggs and butter on failing to take Holy Orders — that, I think, is the expression.

"London eggs," I said, "are not to be trusted. You know that? Some Londoners like them; funny taste, is n't it?"

"The egg's?" said the young man.

"No, I meant on the part of the Londoners! But the egg does as well."

"Not as well as the country one?" he suggested.

"Naturally you would not think so; neither do I."

I got up to ring the bell. At the same moment he sprang up and we collided. "You must stay to luncheon," I said.

He said he would be very pleased.

"Three to lunch," I said to James, who answered the bell.

"Hens are the least interesting of all animals," I said, returning to the fray, "don't you think so?"

Mr. May said they undoubtedly were, but very necessary.

That, of course, went without saying. I asked if he depended on them entirely, and he said, "For breakfast?"

And I said, "As a product."

I feverishly made conversation until Daphne arrived. I thought she was never coming. I was thankful the young man was so presentable.

"My friend who is coming to lunch," I said, "I am afraid you will find is n't very much interested in country produce; you won't mind?"

He said, "Not in the least."

Ashbee announced Lady Danby. I rose to meet her. "May I introduce Mr. May?" I said, trying to keep down the note of triumph in my voice.

Daphne nodded to him quite kindly, disguising the surprise she must have felt. By the time this was over, Ashbee flung open the double doors and said luncheon was served. I wondered how much of it there was. I was afraid not enough to justify the opening of the double doors.

"This is very wonderful of you, Priscilla," said Daphne. "Only just arrived and a party!"

She laid stress on the word "party." It is possible the egg and butter young man had never before been so classified.

He murmured that he had n't realised we had only just arrived.

"I like people dropping into luncheon, unexpectedly," I said, leading the way downstairs.

"But this was n't quite unexpectedly," said Daphne, following me.

"No, not quite," I admitted.

We sat down to luncheon; on one side of me Daphne, on the other the egg and butter man.

"Is the pasture good this year?" I asked, turning to him.

"I believe so," he replied, looking very confused.

"Your heart is still in the country, Priscilla," said Daphne.

I nodded. I was sorry the first dish handed round should have been an egg one. Sorry, because to eat shop must be as tedious to some as to talk it is to others, and yet I was glad that the young man should see I really had got excellent eggs from the country.

At last Mr. May, summoning up courage, having eaten every bit of the egg, turned to me and said, "Is your mother in town?"

"You mean my aunt," I said. "No, she lives entirely in the country. She is devoted to chickens. But I don't think she has any special success with them."

The young man grew crimson and bowed. As much as to imply that my aunt was at perfect liberty to succeed or not as she liked. He felt no professional jealousy.

I saw Daphne lower her head until the brim of her hat hid her face. "Do you find cows intelligent?" she asked, when she lifted her head.

Still more crimson grew Mr. May. "Not very," he replied, "but they want understanding."

"Of course," I said, "as we all do."

Directly luncheon was over, Mr. May rose and said,

Would I excuse him, he had a train to catch? I said of course I would.

I followed him to the door and said hurriedly, "You quite understand about the eggs and butter, don't you?"

"Quite," he said.

"What a very strange young man," said Daphne when I returned to my coffee. "Where did you pick him up? It is refreshing to see anything blush so easily."

"Christopher picks up strange young men sometimes. This one is farming."

"Um," said Daphne. "This one does n't seem to know much about it."

"They very seldom do," I said.

"Who?"

"The young men who learn. That 's why they learn," I said triumphantly, as an afterthought.

Of course Daphne must have suspected something, but for all that he was quite a nice young man and to find one so respectable waiting for me, just at the moment I wanted him, was very lucky. He saved me having to tell Daphne that I did n't want to lunch with her in public.

"Christopher," I said that evening, "you know you telephoned and told me not to —"

"Not to go out with Daphne?"

"Yes. Well, I was on the point of starting when you spoke to me — she —"

"Well?"

"I had to go."

"Why?"

"Because she was there and I had no excuse ready. She wore, as it happens, an extinguishing veil that obliterated one eye and her nose. She asked me to lunch with her at a restaurant —"

Christopher nodded.

"And I said I had someone lunching with me — having said that I had to get someone."

Again Christopher nodded.

"Or she would have suspected something. Well, I was very lucky: I came in and found a young man waiting to see me — a butter and egg young man. Directly I saw him I saw that he would do to ask to lunch on an emergency, so I did, and I made it all right with Daphne." I paused. "Is there any reason I should not go out with her?"

"I would rather you did n't just at present; and this butter and egg young man — I saw him; he came before I went out — a most impossible person, a bounder! How could you ask him within a hundred yards of you?"

"I liked him," I said, "and for a sudden inspiration he was n't at all bad. He might have been quite impossible."

"I should have said he was."

"He said quite kind things about hens, about understanding them; I think very few people try to do that."

"You must be prudent, Priscilla; don't ask stray people in to lunch, you will get into awful difficulties."

"It was difficult."

"It's all difficult," he said, and we let the subject drop.

By way of starting a new one, I said, "The dress-

maker was very pleased with my lines — my own, I mean."

"Who else's could they be, if not your own?"

"My staymaker's. The dressmaker was n't pleased with those; she said I had a most beautiful figure spoilt! I am going to be very smart," I slid my hand down the table and took Christopher's, "and I hate it."

"If I can bear it, you can. Try, to please me; it's for your good. Will you try?"

I said I would. I wonder if any two young people ever came to London in a state of mind as resigned as ours.

I asked Ashbee if the young gentleman who had stayed to luncheon was the same Mr. Jerrold had seen in the morning, and Ashbee said, No. The one who had been in the morning had had red whiskers. He said it in a tone of voice as much as to say that it would have been quite impossible, even for me, to have asked that one to lunch, as, indeed, I hope it would have been. But I don't trust myself.

The following day the mystery was solved by the receipt of a letter. It was written from a club whose members pride themselves on its exclusiveness. The letter began: —

Dear Miss Jerrold, —

I don't know how to explain my conduct of this morning. I knew at once that you had mistaken me for someone else. Who that someone is I must say I should like to know; but you will never tell me anything till I make a clean breast of it. To tell the absolute truth, I did n't want to explain to-day because

you might, for all your understanding, have shown me the door. The whole thing began by my asking if "anybody was at home," and I did that because I stammer most confoundedly. I would n't take No, and insisted on waiting. The people from whom you have taken the house are my friends. Their name being Cattwell, I can't pronounce it. At first I thought you were the daughter I wanted to meet, who has just left school. That was when you first came into the room. From that moment onwards I lost interest in every one else but you. I hope you don't mind my saying this. It's no use pretending anything else. I always know my own mind, and always have, and always shall. The only thing that worries me is that I was n't, of course, playing the game. I can see you are fearfully keen about country things and so am I. I could like hens awfully if I put my mind to it. They are jolly beasts, I am sure, and awfully willing. I am frightfully sorry I said that about your mother. I can only hope, now I've said what I've dreaded saying for years, I shall never do it again. Perhaps your aunt will allow me to come and pay my respects. My name is Killin, as of course you will see if you have the kindness and patience to read to the end of this rigmarole. In case you have n't, I give it now. I have quite a nice place in Ireland; but I mean to be a good deal in Town this season: it depends on circumstances. If there should be a hen show or any show of any sort that interests you, will you allow me to take you? Of course I know Lady Danby by sight. I hope you will understand and forgive me for what happened this morning. I am only sorry I felt so acutely being there under false pretences, as I might

have enjoyed it even more than I did. May I hope you will forgive,

Yours very sincerely,

KILLIN.

I went to Christopher with the letter. I said, "I've heard from the butter and egg young man; he's not that at all, he's a young man of the name of Killin, Irish. He says he could really like hens very much; that he does, although he did n't know it."

"What's the joke?" said Christopher.

I handed him the letter and I sat on the arm of his chair.

"It's no joke, and I'm sorry for him," I said.

Christopher read the letter through, turned back and read it through again; then he laughed. "Confound the beggar's impertinence, and you, Priscilla, what d' you mean by looking like a little girl in the school-room? What d' you mean?"

"What shall I write and say?" I asked, ignoring the question.

"Write and say that if he is in the neighbourhood again, your husband will be very glad to see him."

"And not that I am sorry for him?"

"Not one word! You're not to be sorry for anyone while we are in London. If you are it is in direct opposition to my expressed wishes!"

I told Christopher he was delicious and I went and wrote to the young man.

He did n't call; no one called. I told Christopher nobody knew we were in Town; that I could n't face Ashbee unless someone came to call soon. Christopher,

by way of consolation, said it was n't as if Ashbee were new, and suggested we should put our arrival in the "Morning Post." I said I could n't bear that; however, I did bear it and Aunt Jolly wrote to know what I felt like, the notoriety of it appalled her. She thinks the name of a gentlewoman should, so far as is possible, be kept out of the newspaper. Christopher supposed it might with perfect good taste and delicacy appear three times? And Aunt Jolly said, "Undoubtedly — even more — three times does not admit of a family."

The immediate result of the announcement was sixteen cards. Four wives, eight husbands, four sons. The wives' cards were turned down. Daphne wanted to know where they lived.

It is easy enough to joke on such subjects, but my position was a serious one. The motor did everything I wanted to do in about half an hour. I could not bear coming home so early every afternoon to meet the pained expression on Ashbee's face. If he was not new, the footman was. I confided my troubles to Christopher. He suggested I should take the "Morning Post" each day and read down the list of births, then go and call and enquire for all the mothers.

"Think, darling," he said, "how your kind little heart will rejoice when you hear those dear old familiar words, 'Going on as well as can be expected.' You need n't leave cards, you can say you have forgotten them. I should n't enquire for Wimbledon mothers if I were you!"

I asked him to be serious and imagine what I should feel if the mothers were *not* going on as well as could be expected!

"Then," said Christopher, very seriously, "we should have to return the tickets."

"What tickets?" I asked. "Tickets" being to me what "rats" is to a dog.

"The theatre tickets," said Christopher, "I should have taken in order to use the motor. That I foresee I shall have to take."

I told him he was delicious, and he said he should soon begin to believe it.

One morning I said to him, "What shall I do to-day?"

And he said he wanted me to do just what I liked, independently of him. He wanted me to have interests of my own, friends of my own. So long as I kept clear of egg and butter men. He wanted me to stand alone. He begged me to try to please him!

I set out to live my own day, wondering what was in Christopher's chaotic mind. I went to Harrod's in the morning. I went up and down every lift several times — that I enjoyed. I went into every department, at least I thought I did; but Best said I could n't have done it in the time. I met charming girls walking together, talking and having such fun. One spoke to me and said, "Here you are!" Then said hurriedly, "I thought you were Dumpy"; and when I said I wished I were, her face froze, and a moment later I saw her hook her arm through, I supposed, the arm of the real Dumpy and more than ever I wished I were Dumpy. I met so many Dumpys as I walked up Sloane Street. They all had very small noses and very big hats and lovely complexions, and they all laughed a good deal, and I heard one say to another as they were waiting to cross the road, "Can he dance?" and the other

answered, "No, not a bit, but he has the most glorious eyes." And I felt lonely and out of it. I walked up and down Sloane Street, where everyone seemed to know the other. I took my courage in both hands and boldly asked, in a shop, of a very smart woman the price of a hat. I bought, not in the hat shop, a penwiper, an account book, a tube of seccotine, six photograph frames, and a watering-can. It was then past eleven, and I wended my way to Kensington Gardens.

In the distance, sitting under a tree and talking to a sparrow, I saw a man. He was leaning forward in his chair, in an attitude of deepest dejection, his hat over his eyes, a stick in his hands.

A yard or two off stood the sparrow telling him to cheer up — he pronounced it "chirrup"; — life was n't such a bad thing after all; there was never a day without some crumb of comfort to be found. "Prupp" the sparrow was gone, leaving the sad and dejected man.

He looked at me and said, "Priscilla!"

I said, "Christopher!"

Could it be that such joy as this could be had for a penny?

I sat down. "Shall I stay?" I said.

"What d' you think?"

"It's lovely."

"I'm not sure you're not — look at me!"

I looked, we laughed, and I looked away.

"Priscilla!"

I shook my head.

We went to the Round Pond and we watched children, grown up and otherwise, sailing boats, and we

went and sat in the Walk and watched the babies pass.

"Oh, look at that darling, Christopher!" I said.

"Come, let's go home," he said, becoming suddenly very stern and serious.

I smiled.

XIII

FOR a purpose I bought those photograph frames in Sloane Street. Daphne Danby says no wife should ever show jealousy of her husband. It gives him an exaggerated idea of his own importance and underrates hers. It kills love quicker than anything.

While not taking Daphne as a model wife, I thought she might know what a wife in London should be. Without her advice I should take every opportunity to show Christopher I was not jealous. That is the A B C of married understandingness. I had often longed for a test. In packing up for London I found one; I came across six photographs of six different women in a drawer of his writing-table.

It is a moot question whether six of one woman or six of six women is the greater evil. It depends somewhat on the temperament of the wife who finds the photographs.

These women were not particularly pretty. But they might, of course, have possessed that mysterious thing called charm which defies definition, and troubles many really pretty women who do not possess it. Nor were these women particularly young-looking. But Christopher had found them sufficiently charming to think their photographs worth treasuring.

I stood the photographs up in a row, and tried honestly, and failed, to choose which would have made Christopher the best wife.

Not one of them to my mind was suitable. I was a prejudiced party, no doubt, and difficult to please. I

could n't feel jealous of any of them. But I disliked them all, especially the youngest, and in her it was the spirit of exaggeration that annoyed me. It showed in her hair, and in the size of the locket she wore.

I put the photographs in the frames I had bought and put them away until such a moment as should seem the right one to present them to Christopher. Why, because he had married me, should he be debarred from gazing on the photographs of others he had loved? I hated to think he, perhaps, did it after I had gone to bed.

I should, when the time came, put them in their order of merit on his mantelpiece. The youngest, judging by looks, should come first. But she would have bored him; she was of too ardent a disposition. So I decided to put her in the middle, balanced on the one side by a very just woman, on the other, by a very good housekeeper. The woman with the humorous mouth I should put first. There were two others. In their cases I could find no excuse for Christopher; unless he had met them on his tour round the world. There is a kind of beauty that is purely geographical.

When we had been settled a few days in London, Aunt Jolly wrote to me. She never fails to give me good advice at any moment of my life when she thinks I am in need of it.

She wrote: —

My very dear Priscilla: —

Your own good sense should tell you what, and still more what not, to do, on going into what must be to you a new world, and I grieve to say a wicked one.

Don't think, my child, that because you have been loved and made much of by simple people in the country, you will have London at your feet. Nor is it desirable that London should be there. We need not, perhaps, apprehend danger on that ground.

Don't go out much alone, because, although you are far from beautiful, you always did, even as a child, attract attention. What do you feel about a hair-net? They look tidy, I believe, and the advertisements say they *don't* show. If they *don't* show, how can they look tidy, you will say? Don't say things for effect, dear child!

If you go out without Richard, let it be in the morning — the shady side of the street.

If you walk on the sunny side a passer-by might say, "How hot that young woman must be!" and you become at once conspicuous by being the object of speculation.

Of course you never look round in the street. Poor Mildred committed that great error in taste and judgment, because the street boys had copied her husband's whistle. I think Richard has a whistle that only a few very cultured people can do. What a comfort!

Don't make friends hastily. Be sure that you have been introduced, and, if someone asserts that he has been introduced, carefully note his manner when you ask him when and where? If he cannot satisfactorily, and at *once*, answer these questions, go to Richard's side and lay your hand lightly on his arm. I am picturing you both at a reception. I should have the key of the area-gate laid on your blotter at eight o'clock P.M. Don't tell absurd stories in order to discover if

people have a sense of humour, because they may have one, although it is not yours.

You know, dear, I could never see the asparagus story, yet I laughed immoderately at the ostrich one — you know, where the ostrich sat on the missionary's bald head? I never say missionary, however; I substitute travelling politician. It does not spoil the story and is less likely to offend.

Don't say things you don't mean, to see how far people will believe you; it is not good taste. Cultivate rather a taste for pictures. Frequent picture galleries. Don't let women address you, on too short an acquaintance, by your Christian name. Remember you are still very young. Obey Richard in all things; and go to tradesmen proper, not stores. Your father always did, so far as his means permitted, and stores are no cheaper nowadays. Be careful in your choice of a church. Try to find pews, not chairs. Chairs tend to extremes. Mind the crossings. Good-bye, my dear Priscilla. God bless and keep you from all dangers — avoid lobsters on Mondays.

Your loving,

AUNT JOLLY.

P.S. — I should n't tell your banana dream. Remember that throughout the breadth and length of the civilised world widows are prayed for in every church; therefore you must not make them the subject of an absurd story.

In spite of that exhortation I told my dream the very first time I dined out. The man who took me in to

dinner was interested in dreams and things psychic. How otherwise, he asked, was it he knew, at once, that he had seen me before? That he felt he knew me intimately? Did n't it point to a former existence?

I shook my head. He asked me if I dreamed. I said, of course I did. He said he could see it in my face. Were they strange things, my dreams? I said they were. My banana dream was very.

"Do tell me! A banana! What a curiously unsuggestive thing to dream about."

I told it to him.

"That, of course," he said, "was your subconscious mind."

I said my subconscious mind was clearly more amusing than my conscious mind, and he said, "And that I should imagine is unconsciously amusing."

"I wonder!" I said.

I suppose no one who says "I wonder" could aspire to be a social success. There is a finality about it that is bound to be disconcerting to the one who is trying to make conversation.

"Christopher," I said, "did n't think the banana dream funny."

"Who is Christopher?" asked the young man.

"There," I said, with pride, indicating with a nod, Christopher. "Three from the girl in green."

"Why not next the girl in white?"

I said she did n't seem to count.

"You have only been a short time in London and you see that? You will go far!"

I said I did n't mean to be unkind to the girl in white; she was very sweet-looking.

"Marvellous!" said the young man. "You, too, see the poor child is sweet-looking! It would take a far cleverer woman than she will ever be to live that down."

He seemed plunged in gloom while he thought of the girl and contemplated Christopher. "What must it be to some women to point out, as theirs, some husbands!" I thought.

The young man asked if he might call. I said, of course, Christopher was always in by six. The young man came, but much earlier than six. He stayed two hours. Three times did Ashbee come in to arrange the sun-blinds. The young man was very silent. I think he was waiting for my subconscious mind to act. At the end of the two hours he rose and holding my hand said impressively, "Why bananas and widows; what's the connection?"

XIV

A SOCIAL life to a beginner is beset with difficulties. The very precautions taken assume the nature of pitfalls.

Both Christopher and I saw the necessity, at dinners, of a specified code of signalling. Some means by which we could warn each other of dangers and catastrophies. For instance, — supposing Christopher had something hanging on to his mustache or I had something showing not meant to show, — which happened to poor Cordelia Trant when she dined with us and above her bodice rose the corner of a letter and on it a twopenny-halfpenny stamp. So we arranged that we should signal one to the other, quite quietly, so that no one else could possibly notice it.

The occasion arose. We dined out. It was a very large dinner-party — why should such things exist? I suppose, inadvertently, I touched my cheek. Christopher, taking it for a signal, raised his eyebrows and touched his. Deliriously I touched mine. In a second the spark of apprehension was fanned into the flame of desperation. In a very short time we were in a state of frenzy. Across an acre of orchids I saw the distraught face of Christopher. I shook my head and smiled, and, turning to the man next me, said, "Is there anything wrong with me?"

He looked at me very seriously and said he saw nothing wrong at all. He said it in such a way that I was bound to explain why I had asked. I saw that

Christopher, too, had asked of the woman next him the same question, and she had evidently answered it in the same way, although with rather more than necessary warmth. She could have expressed her opinion less forcibly. For the first time I looked seriously at the man on my left, of whom I had asked the question. I was sorry he had not taken me in to dinner. He looked delightful and I left the man who had taken me in, with a feeling of relief. He had made me feel eighteen, unworldly, and devoted to good works; which are perhaps more excellent things to be than to look.

The man on my left pushed the card, on which his name was written, towards me and I pushed mine towards him. "It's the simplest way, is n't it?" he said. "You see, I discover at a glance that your husband is possibly related to the Chuckles, who was at Eton with my young brother, and who stayed with us for a cricket match, and I remember that mine was the painful honour to be the victim of his first century. I mean I bowled and was judged too old to be 'taken off.'"

"He *was* Chuckles," I said.

"But," he looked at the card, "surely I see Christopher here? Chuckles's name was Richard."

"Yes, his name is Richard! Christopher is my name for him."

"I see. Why not Ambrose?"

"Why Ambrose?"

"Why not?" he smiled. "Another use of the card is that it tells me a thing I should never have guessed, and that is that you are the wife of anyone."

"You would n't have thought me the widow?"

"Certainly not the widow."

I asked him if he knew a man called Killin?

"Certainly, I know a man of that name, an Irishman, a warm-hearted Irishman. Baron Killin, of Corriekillin, an impulsive young man."

"He likes hens?" I said.

"That I did n't know; but in so much as they are undoubtedly feminine we may presume he would be interested in them."

I told him the story of my meeting with the egg and butter man.

"Poor Killin —" he said. "You had no card to pass him. Now you see its uses."

"Where do you live?" I asked.

"I live at Popham whenever I can, and in Town when I must."

"Where is Popham?"

"It is impossible you should not know, and yet it is delightful to find anyone who does n't. In your case because I hope to have the pleasure of introducing it to you and you to it. We are jealous of Popham, although I, as a fairly new inhabitant, should not be greedy."

"Why is it so delightful?" I asked, a little jealous for Dell.

"Possibly because — well, because the Howards live there — and Miss Dorinda."

"Which is your wife?" I asked, feeling sure that the delights of Popham were not entirely dissociated from her.

He showed me, and I said, "And possibly because you met her there?"

"Well, not exactly. I had met her before she lived there; but it's associated more with her than anything."

I said I thought she looked perfectly delicious and he laughed.

"Don't *you?*" I said, and he laughed again in the way a man does laugh when the wife he dearly loves is praised.

"Tell me some more," I said.

After dinner Christopher came up to me in the drawing-room and said, "Who was the friend you found so amusing?"

"A very old friend of yours, Mr. Grey; his brother was at Eton with you."

At that moment Mr. Grey joined us. "Well, Chuckles!" he said. That was all; the gulf of years was spanned in a moment. The men made up for lost time until our hostess separated them. Two men who have been boys together and meet again are harder to separate than fighting dogs.

What constitutes social success in London, I wonder. Not, I believe, the number of times one dines out, or might dine out, but rather the number of people one hardly knows who call one by one's Christian name.

If I came up to the standard in social engagements I fell short of it in the matter of Christian name acquaintances. Yet I had my chances. Aunt Jolly had warned me against it as a pitfall. But she had never warned me against the young men who would ask me to call them by their nicknames.

One night, after dinner, at Ranelagh, a young man asked me to call him "Teddy." The band had just been playing a selection from "The Merry Widow."

Under the circumstances it was as far as he felt impelled to go. "Everyone does," he pleaded. I told him on that score it did not tempt me. At that moment the band began to play the overture from "Tannhäuser." The air became, at once, charged with electricity. In a moment chaperones became dangerous, not in their office, but outside it. The young man, in a voice full of suppressed emotion, asked me to call him "Buttercup." "Very few do that," he said. "D' you remember holding a buttercup under the chin of the little boy you loved?"

I nodded; of course I did. The memory of that without "Tannhäuser" would have given me a thrill.

"I suppose," he said, "every little boy and every little girl does it. It's an absurd name, is n't it?"

"Why are you called it?" I asked.

"My fair hair, I suppose."

"Of course," I said; "how stupid."

"Oh, why? Will you?"

"Does your mother call you that?" I asked, knowing that to talk to a young man of his mother is the A B C of feminine influence.

"Oh, Lord, no," he said. "Will *you?*"

Call him "Buttercup?" I said I thought not, and he was instantly plunged in melancholy meditation.

"I don't know what there is about you," he said, after a pause; "you seem to understand a chap — somehow or other."

"Do you feel that?" I said. "I am so glad. It's what I want to do more than anything."

"To understand me?" he asked, surprised yet grateful.

"Well, yes; not you specially; I want to understand everyone."

"Don't try," he said. "Just concentrate on me — I'm worth it. There's a tremendous lot in me, but it takes finding out. I'm most confoundedly complex!"

"Are you in love?" I asked tentatively.

"Hit it in one — fairly desperately."

"Tell me," I said.

"I don't know whether my mother has n't put you up to this!"

"I don't even know who she is," I said.

"There are n't many with over three thousand a year who can say that! Her theory is that all charity is subscribed by the same few people; it's her mission in life to see that everyone who can gives more than they can afford; she's a strenuous person is my mother; a good sort — but fairly strenuous. I don't know where she gets it from; not from me, that's certain. Up and doing she is, you know! She not only does things, she deals with them."

"Does she understand people?" I asked.

"Is it likely? She's too serious for that. It takes a woman of leisure to bring her mind down to understanding. You can't be on a committee and understand, too. It would make things jolly awkward if each member of the committee understood. That none of them will ever have the faintest glimmering is their salvation and the salvation of the charity they commit to its dissolution — is that the word?"

Not following Buttercup and feeling that I was far from understanding him, I reverted to the love affair; that I felt I really understood, although I was very

much afraid the girl could hardly be expected to fall in love with him. "You have n't told me about *her?*" I said.

He asked if I could stand shock one?

I braced myself up. Mentally I shut my eyes and held the world up with my knees as I used to do the pony at home, when I drove him.

"Yes!" I said.

"She dances."

It was over! I found the shock quite bearable.

"Does your mother disapprove?"

"Of course. Would n't yours?"

"Aunt Jolly — I mean my aunt — thinks waltzing is n't, in theory, very nice."

"Waltzing? Oh, yes, this is the other sort of dancing."

There was a pause. "Not Sal —?" I said, my flesh creeping.

"That sort of thing. It's divine — there's soul in it — it appeals to the highest."

"To royalties?" I asked, awed.

"Naturally, but I meant the highest in one's nature."

"Of course," I said, in an agony at having misunderstood.

I asked if he was engaged. I asked, in my most spaniel voice, if he was unhappy, feeling I must make up so far as was possible for my terrible blunder of the moment before. He said he wished he knew. I felt for him. A sorrow one can't define is perhaps the worst of all sorrows.

We sat in silence. What could I do for this poor boy?

He suggested I should come to tea with him. He sup-

posed I would n't? I said of course I would. It seemed little enough to do for a soul who did n't know whether he was in despair or not. Here was an opportunity to help a young man on the threshold of life. Perhaps he was standing on the edge of a morass. I could hold him back; draw him gently back till he stood on the firm, hard ground of domestic felicity. I might see him through a difficult time and finally marry him to a nice, charming, sympathetic, country girl who wore square-toed shoes. It was a field for missionary enterprise.

"What d' you do when you feel thoroughly miserable?" he asked.

Now here was a difficulty! I had seldom felt really miserable except about Lord Danby, and of that sorrow I could n't speak. Yet to say I had only once had cause for unhappiness would show a want of sympathy. To sympathise truly one must have suffered greatly. "There is nothing to be done," I said, gazing into space.

He said there was always silk socks to fall back upon; that they were a stand-by when everything else failed. "I always buy them when I feel really low," he said, also gazing into space. Then he added more cheerfully, "D' you like strawberries?"

It was safer ground. I felt my head under the strawberry net.

"I do!" I said.

He pulled down his shirt cuff and wrote something on it.

"Wait one moment," I said.

The moment had gone. It was snatched by our hostess who came up and introduced to me a Count von Etwas. Buttercup retired murmuring.

"You German speak?" said Count von Etwas, plumping down into the chair beside me. He did not wait for my answer.

"Den must I English sprechen — since dree veeks only."

He arched his eyebrows and held up three fingers — nice fingers. The English he spoke was limited, but expressed wonderfully what he wished to say. He was an apt pupil, I an amused instructress.

We discussed every subject and we got at last to buses. In Germany, he said, no gentleman — I imagined he meant no officer — went on a bus.

"Do dey so in London go?" he asked.

"Why, yes, and ladies, too. I go on a bus," I said by way of conclusive argument.

"You go on ze booze?" he said. "You go on ze booze!" louder and louder, until I felt the eyes of everyone upon me. This was a position in which no niece of an Aunt Jolly should ever have found herself.

Then he told me in a much softer voice that he could with me "all ze night talk."

I glowed with pleasure at this tribute. For the second time that evening I had been a help to someone in difficulties, if not in trouble. I smiled.

"You have ze face so —" He waved his hands about; I hoped he was n't trying to indicate the circumference of my face.

I longed to know what my face was, but before Count von Etwas could find the word Christopher came up and snapped his watch at me.

As we drove home he said, "What was that chap saying?"

"He said, with great difficulty, that, with great pleasure, would he the whole night with me talk."

"Sensible chap that."

"I liked him," I said. "I think I was a help to him."

"You won't carry this helping business too far will you, Priscilla? There are surely heaps of women clamouring for sympathy. Help them, will you?"

I said, of course I would. Did he imagine I helped men because they were men?

"Not without calling them brothers first, I admit. But there's too much of this brotherly business about. It's the last thing a man wishes to be to a pretty woman."

"To a *pretty* woman, yes, Christopher. I know that."

I enjoyed my evening at Ranelagh and my drive home with Christopher; but I cried the greater part of the night because, in the hall as we were coming away, I caught a glimpse of Lord Danby.

"I am tired of London," I said to Christopher, the next morning at breakfast.

"You will like it in time. Try, to please me."

XV

I WAS becoming such a woman of the world that it came naturally to me to say to Ashbee, "The motor at half-past three." I no longer felt an insane impulse to tell him where I was going and why. Neither did I apologise to him if I was too late or too early for tea. Perhaps I had never really gone as far as that, but it is possible Ashbee would not have been astonished if I had, which is just as bad.

Christopher was accepting so readily the new state of affairs that he had sent to Dell for his clubs and most days found him golfing an hour away from Town, which made a great change in his outlook on life. He was quite convinced that I was trying to enjoy myself immensely.

It did not occur to me, being a woman of fashion, that I should n't go to tea with Buttercup at his flat; neither did it occur to me to tell Christopher I was going. This surely was an opportunity to stand alone. I went. Mr. Jarvis was "At home," at the very tiptop of the building. I stepped into the lift and was shot up with the greatest ease to the door of Buttercup's flat. The height of happiness and the depth of wickedness are not necessarily expressed in the building of flats.

The door was opened by a manservant who looked as circumspect in every way as Ashbee is. I thought he examined me a little carefully; then I remembered I was wearing a new frock. Everyone would be as quick to see that, as I was to feel it.

Best had said, when I had put it on, that the first spot, so long as it was n't in front, would come almost as a relief.

I found Buttercup dozing. He was lying in a deep armchair, with his legs up. It was an attitude familiar to me and of most painful association. I would rather see a man in any other position. So had sat Lord Danby the night his wife had not run away.

"I've come," I said.

The long legs seemed to fold themselves up like a camera stand. Buttercup rose.

"You!" he said. "How too ripping of you!"

"Is n't it delicious here?" I said. I referred to the view out of the window. Aunt Jolly had warned me against a young man's mantelpiece. Religiously I kept my eyes away from it.

"Quite nice, is n't it?" he said. "Jolly things, roofs."

"You've got the strawberries?" I said.

"*Rather*," he answered.

"I telephoned to say I was coming; I was n't sure if you understood. You did?"

"*Rather*. You *do* like strawberries?"

I said, "*Rather*." It's a catching word.

We did n't seem to be getting on very well. Was I failing to understand him? Was my manner unsympathetic? To get my face in order I thought of the saddest thing I could think of and turning to him said, "Are things happier?"

I wanted to show him I came as a friend and counsellor and not as a worldly friend with thoughts only of strawberries.

"So, so," he said, making a little ballet girl of the tassel on the blind cord. "My mother's as hard as —" he brought his foot down on the floor with a bang and the tea-cups, two in number, clattered. How awful it would have been if there had only been one!

I said, "I'm so —"

The door opened and into the room came a vision of beauty. It stood a moment framed in the doorway — irresistible. Even Daphne Danby sank into insignificance beside this apparition. No one in Dell was so deliberately slim; no one had eyes quite so big; nobody, I must admit, had a hat so large; no one had quite the same manner. The appealing candour of a child, combined with the aplomb of an ambassadress.

"My sister," said Buttercup, and he sent the tassel with a spin up the length of the cord. I looked at the photographs on the mantelpiece. I bowed to this delicious sister and envied her for Bobbie. The delicious sister bowed to me and rippled a delightful laugh. How odd it was, I thought, that he should have such a sister and such a mother!

"Do you live at home?" I asked, hardly conscious of what I was saying. Committees I could not connect with this creature.

"Do I, Butter?" she said, turning a pair of beseeching eyes Butterwards.

"Always at home anywhere," he said, lighting a cigarette. "May I — Mrs. —?"

"Jerrold," I said, growing crimson; I felt the warm glow run all over me even to my finger-tips.

"He's a silly," said his sister, turning to me, "he always was."

"I only —" I felt embarrassed and shy. My feet seemed so large, my dress so badly fitting, my nose the wrong shape.

Butter's sister, on the contrary, must have felt entirely at home with her feet. She stuck them out so that both Butter and I could see the beauty of the slim ankles and the fineness of the silk stockings that clothed them. Personally I do not care for flesh-coloured stockings in the daytime. I am old-fashioned, I know, and in the matter of flesh-coloured stockings I would prefer to remain so. I began to think that Buttercup's mother had, after all, some cause for complaint in having two children so unlike herself, who could take no interest in her interests.

"Are you interested in Eugenics, too?" I asked the sister.

"We are — are n't we, Butter? — fearfully interested. I can't sleep at night for thinking about them."

She opened her eyes very wide, then half closed them; then looked down and left me undecided as to when I most admired her. Then I decided that she looked, perhaps, most fascinating when her long eyelashes lay on her cheek; then, when she looked up again, I was n't sure.

She spoke hardly at all, but she was certainly very beautiful to look at. One realised it most when she was silent. When she spoke she did so with great emphasis. If she disagreed with Buttercup she drummed her little fists on her knees and said, "Yes, yes, yes," unless it happened to be "No, no, no," which it most often was.

It was wonderful how quickly Buttercup gave in. It was a mode of argument that would have convinced

most men. I was quite glad there was little chance of Christopher being submitted to the test; but Buttercup I should have thought might have become more or less accustomed to it and therefore more obdurate.

Seeing there was, at the moment, nothing I could particularly do to help Buttercup, and feeling a little sore that he should have forgotten my name, I said I must go; they probably had family matters to discuss.

Buttercup came to the lift with me and went back to the flat rather hurriedly, I thought. Almost before the lift had started, I heard peals of laughter coming from Buttercup's drawing-room.

Of course it was just as Bobbie and I may some day laugh if Bobbie ever has a flat of his own and someone whose name he does n't know comes to tea with him.

Tea! It was not until then I remembered I had had no tea. Nor could I have eaten any, because of the lump in my throat that always came when I found myself less of a woman of the world than I had hoped.

I thought no more of Buttercup and his sister; at least, I determined to think no more, which perhaps is not quite the same thing. He was now outside my province. He had a sister to help him; someone in whom he could confide; someone with whom he was evidently in the closest sympathy. I must set out to find a young man with no relations.

A few days later I was standing outside Harrod's waiting for my car when I saw Buttercup's sister. She was if possible more beautiful than ever. She wore a

very small hat, which made her eyes seem even bigger than before. She did not recognise me, which I suppose was quite natural as I had on another hat. She looked right through me. She was very cross. She evidently wanted a taxi and could n't get one. She was using the same sort of argument with the commissionaire she had used with her brother; this time with her feet instead of her fists.

I spoke to her; I begged her to allow me to give her a lift.

"You!" she said.

"Yes, here is my car. Please get in."

She got in and I followed. I asked her where she wanted to go. I assured her I could take her anywhere. She paused, and then with a radiant smile chose Bond Street.

As we drove up Piccadilly she told me exactly what she thought of foreign royalties coming to London. To their door she laid the dearth of taxis. It was too bad! Royalties were delicious things, and she would love to be one for a few hours, just to see what it was like; there was nothing she would n't like to be just for the experience; but it was bad of them to come and take away all her taxis! This with a frown, but so fascinating that if I had been a man I might at that moment have become the most dangerous of regicides. But being a woman and not a worldly one I said, "Do royalties drive in them?"

And she said, "How sweet!"

I felt crushed. It was quite evident that royalties did not, but I wondered why it was sweet of me to imagine they might.

"This is too ducky of you," she said as we drove up Bond Street.

"And now where?" I said.

"Down again, please."

We drove continually up and down Bond Street. On our last journey down we saw Buttercup standing on the pavement, I imagined with his mother, about to effect a perilous crossing.

"You would like to stop, would n't you?" I said.

"No, no, no!"

She bowed and waved. She kissed her hand and Buttercup raised his hat. I was surprised, but not more so than Buttercup looked. I supposed he had again forgotten me.

"And now?" I said.

"Woolland's."

The shortest way to Woolland's from Harrod's was hardly by Bond Street. But I, supposed a drive in a motor was a treat to Buttercup's sister. Although she looked as if there were little left in life that could come as a treat. It shows how little one can tell.

I said she and Buttercup must be great friends.

She looked at me quickly. "Oh, yes, rather! We are rather alike?"

I said I did see a likeness, in a way. I got very hot as I said it, because I saw none; but felt it unsympathetic to say so, and after all I ought to be able to see a likeness. "In a way," I repeated.

"Once in a way, yes, I dare say. Something about the nose?"

She touched that very entrancing feature and I shook my head. "No, not the nose exactly."

"Eyes?" she said, opening hers very wide.

"No, not the eyes."

"Mouth?" she said, screwing up a most beautiful mouth which I begged her not to spoil.

"I don't really know," I said, getting very uncomfortable.

She put her lovely head on one side and laughed deliciously. It appeared to me more than ever strange that Butter should possess anything so charming in the way of a sister.

"It's a great thing for him to have you to turn to in his sorrow," I said.

"What sorrow?" she asked. A storm swept over the lovely face; the fine nostrils dilated, the lips quivered, tears gathered in the eyes. I was frightened. No man could have felt a terror greater than mine.

"Trouble, I meant to say."

"What trouble?"

I said his mother would n't hear of his engagement. "Is she really a nice girl or is your mother saving him from himself?"

"Which girl is it?" she asked.

"Oh," I said, feeling crushed again, "she's a dancer."

"Why should n't she be?"

The little feet executed a tattoo on the floor of the car. I did n't draw mine away because it might have shown a lack of sympathy. I bore the pain.

"Oh, no reason, only I don't know that they make the best wives."

She asked why Butter should have the best wife; what had he done to deserve it?

This contrasted so strangely with the devotion she

had shown him a few minutes before that I was nonplussed.

"Why are you against the girl?" she asked.

"I'm not," I said; "I would do anything I could to help her."

"What can you do to help her that she can't do for herself?"

"I don't know. I might help her to be strong enough to give up Butter. I long to help everyone."

"You dear, dear thing," she said. "D' you know I feel exactly as if I had been to church." She folded her hands and gazed upwards. Two young men on the pavement turned to look at a sight so unusual. "I feel so fearfully good," she said. "Were you shocked at my doing that?"

"Yes, I was a little," I said.

"If I do it in fun, who knows that I may n't do it in earnest some day? Thank you so much!"

She held my hand and thanked me again and again. "You don't know now much good you have done me — you sweet little missionary. I have met lots of people I knew, but you have hardly met anyone."

I did n't know what she meant by that. But I said I was glad I had done her good.

"It's just the goodness in your face; there's something about you that reminds me of all that I loved best as a child."

"Tell me?" I said.

She shook her head. "It's neither my nose, nor my mouth, nor my eyes, nor anything that is like Butter. It's just a look — a family likeness. Good-bye, and thank you a thousand times!"

We had reached Woolland's. She stepped out of the car and disappeared through one of the glass doors, leaving me with one and only one clear conviction, and that was that she did not wear stiff, starched, white petticoats.

XVI

THAT same afternoon I went out to tea and I met Mrs. Jarvis, Buttercup's mother. Looking at her she struck me as being capable of being mother to a Buttercup, but under no circumstances to a daughter like his sister. Mrs. Jarvis had Buttercup's long upper lip, small eyes, and his nose. Her colouring must once have been his and in her manner there was something that reminded me of him; but of the delicious sister, nothing.

We talked for a few minutes and in those few minutes she told me that since the death of her dear husband she had sought distraction in philanthropy.

"Was he very handsome?" I asked.

"*I* thought him so," she answered. "But we used to be called Beauty and the Beast."

"He must have been very, very handsome," I said, in my most sympathetic voice. "I mean *you* must have been." I felt myself going cold all over and hastily added, "I met your daughter the other day, it was a great pleasure."

"Dear child, she is such a comfort to me."

"She is *so* beautiful." I said.

"You think so? So do I, but then I'm her mother. She's beautiful to live with. It is the earnestness of her character that appeals to me. I have watched her so carefully."

"Yet she's so"—I sought a word—"bright," I said.

"She has her bright days, dear child."

"I wanted so much to ask her to luncheon and I forgot. Would you take a message to her for me? Ask her if she will lunch with us on Monday?"

Mrs. Jarvis opened a large velvet bag that hung at her side and entered the engagement in a small book. "She will be delighted, I am sure she will. One hundred and six, Cadogan Square; at what hour?"

"Quarter to two," I said.

"At a quarter before two o'clock," said Mrs. Jarvis, and snapped the clasp of the bag. It surprised me that she should be so sure of her daughter's engagements. It also pleased me to find others not more engaged than I was.

Suddenly the whole aspect of Buttercup's mother changed. A thought seemed to strike her. Like a bird that catches sight of a worm Mrs. Jarvis hopped down upon me, and, with her eyes glistening and her head on one side, asked me if I were very busy.

Now knowing that what Daphne Danby called busy and what I called busy were things very different, and afraid of appearing more of a social success than I really was, I said, "Not very."

Nearer still hopped Mrs. Jarvis. "Well, my dear," she said, "there's an immense field of work open to you. I have countless people on my books I have n't time to visit — you shall take some of them."

She took from her bag another book, and, turning over its pages, she said, "Here, here, and here."

There seemed to be written in the book names alphabetically arranged. The name "Blot" caught my eye and I was interested at once. I felt sure the owner of such a name must long to be understood.

"Now here's a case," said Mrs. Jarvis. "She thinks she's a lady; whether she is or not is beside the question. She has a soul."

Mrs. Jarvis said this very slowly and emphatically. Even if she had said it faster and with less emphasis I should not have thought of contradicting her. I was certain Miss Blot must have a soul.

"Well, there's a chance for you. Will you go and see her? She's most respectable, of course; given, perhaps to exaggeration. She takes little dogs out walking, when she can get it to do. If it's a muddy day she wipes the dog down when she brings it in, in the outer hall, of course; the servants are quite civil to her; she never seems to rub them up. She's very thorough. Will you go and see her?"

What could I say but that I would? It was the least I could do for Miss Blot, who was prepared to do so much for other people's dogs!

Having been told by Mrs. Jarvis exactly how many streets down and off the Fulham Road Miss Blot was to be found, and up how many steps when you got to the house, I could do nothing but promise to go at the earliest opportunity.

"If you go in your car, leave it at the corner; don't go to the door because the old woman who lives under Miss Blot has never had a motor visitor and it upsets her."

I suggested it might be a better plan if I put that right at once by going in the motor and calling first upon the old lady who lived under Miss Blot.

Mrs. Jarvis said, on no account, it would n't do! The old woman under Miss Blot paid more for the room than Miss Blot did and that upset Miss Blot, as

it was. To her must be left the honour of the motor visitor.

"But you don't drive up in the motor?" I said.

"No, but she knows I leave it at the corner. That satisfaction is hers. You see that gives her the chance, we should all seek, to exercise self-control. I put it to her quite simply: If she succumbed to the temptation and told the old woman underneath her, and beneath her, that I left the car at the corner, it would show she was no true gentlewoman." Mrs. Jarvis paused while she polished her eyeglasses, then, smiling, she said, "I remember my dear husband being so pleased with me — it was soon after we were married — we were dining out and someone asked me if we had been away lately, and I said, 'Yes, we have been staying in Yorkshire.' Quite simply, just like that! I was wearing my wedding-dress. As we were driving home my husband said, 'I was very struck, dear, at your reticence in saying so simply and naturally that we had been staying in Yorkshire. I feel there were others of the party who would have dragged in our host's name.'" Mrs. Jarvis paused.

"He was a peer," she added.

"I guessed that!" I said; then quailed under the cold gaze of Mrs. Jarvis. I suppose I ought not to have said that. But I was pleased that it had dawned upon me almost as quickly as I felt it would have flashed upon Daphne Danby.

"I only gave that by way of illustration. I constantly dine with peers of the realm," said Mrs. Jarvis.

I thought it better not to say I had not guessed that. So said nothing.

"You will go and see Miss Blot?"

I promised I would, and would Mrs. Jarvis remember my message to her daughter? I went home jubilant. I told Christopher the loveliest girl was coming to lunch on Monday. He asked if he might come? I said it was for him she was coming.

"You are very generous, Priscilla. Are you sure she is really pretty? Or shall I find she has a sweet expression; and such nice, kind, doggie eyes?"

"No, really, really lovely!"

I awaited Monday with the greatest impatience. I provided every delicacy, out of season, for the beautiful sister. I was excited and delighted at giving Christopher such a treat. Underlying it all was the feeling that I was behaving in a most generous and understanding manner. That it was n't every wife who provided a distraction so enchanting for her husband. I felt Christopher owed me more than he knew, but would be quick to acknowledge so soon as he had seen her. I refused to describe her. When he suggested eyes of a certain colour I shook my head. Their colour, as it happened, was the thing that mattered least. I would listen to nothing on the subject of noses. At last he said, "You can't imagine what you are leading me to expect."

Even that did n't disturb me. I knew he could n't be disappointed. I should, of course, expect him to say she was n't his style. That is a concession all husbands but the most tactless make to wifely weakness.

I awaited Monday, as I said before, with the greatest impatience.

At quarter to two exactly, a taxi stopped at the

door. I was surprised. Buttercup's sister looked as if she would be too late for everything. I was glad she was punctual because Christopher likes punctuality and has been known to say that, for some reason unknown, beauty and punctuality never seem to go together.

"Miss Jarvis," announced Ashbee.

I went forward eagerly to meet Miss Jarvis — a tall, gaunt, serious young woman, hygienically dressed, from head to foot, literally.

In her fabric-covered hand my own lay limply. In a deep voice she said, "How d' you do. It's so kind of you to ask me. I don't know you. I don't in the least know where we met; was it at the Dog's Home?"

She was undoubtedly Buttercup's sister. She was Buttercup in petticoats. Quite easily could Mrs. Jarvis be the mother of both. Hardly could she have escaped such a fate.

At that direful moment Christopher came into the room. His step was quite eager; his manner expectant.

"Miss Jarvis, Christopher," I said.

He gave a quick, reproachful, spaniel look. My eyes fell beneath it and my lips trembled.

Christopher was kind to Miss Jarvis, in the way a man is kind to a woman when he has to make the effort to remember she is one. We talked to her on subjects we thought would interest her. That we knew nothing about them she soon discovered. A smile of superiority played about her handsome mouth. It was that.

Seen from one point of view — not quite three-quarter face — she was really almost handsome. In

discussing it later, Christopher would n't admit it. He said she was only better-looking that way because one saw less of her. He was almost angry with me. I could only assure him it was n't the sister I had met.

Directly after luncheon he went out and I was left alone with Miss Jarvis. We talked with difficulty and after a time she rose and apologised for going.

I was beginning to hate London. Strive as I would I should never find social success, unless I sought it perhaps among Miss Blot and her set. I started out to find her and perhaps it. So anxious was I not to miss her that in every old lady walking down the Fulham Road, attached to a little dog, I felt convinced I saw her. One in particular looked so like the name that I stopped and said very kindly, "Are you by any chance Miss Blot?"

"Indeed, I am no such thing," she said, and would have passed on hurriedly, had the little dog allowed it; but it was I who passed on.

Having seen the look of anguish on the face of one, even suspected of bearing the name of Blot, I asked no other old lady the question, and finally reached that particular street, leading out of the Fulham Road, for which I was making. The number I found and wondered if I should as easily find social success. I pressed one of the several little bells, — which I afterwards discovered were never in order, — went through the hall, and proceeded to mount the steep stairs. All of which things I did in accordance with the instructions of Mrs. Jarvis. The hurried prayer I breathed outside the Blot hall door was — as the child in the story said

— quite my own idea. It sounds absurd to say it, but for a minute or two my heart beat so that I had not the courage to knock. I did not know what I was going to say to Miss Blot; how I was going to explain my visit. I knocked at the door and prepared to wait patiently. Like the true gentlewoman I knew her to be, directly I saw her, she did not keep me waiting. She opened the door wide, like one who expects no evil of anyone, and offered me a seat as naturally as she would have offered me a kingdom or a bath bun, if she had had either at her disposal. I sat down. She sat down. Her face said as plainly as possible, "Dog or no dog, that is the question."

I said, "I have n't one in Town."

She raised her eyebrows and smiled. I was perfectly certain she had not the slightest idea whether I referred to a grand piano, or a footman.

"I meant a dog," I said lamely.

"Ah, a dog!" she said, the atmosphere clearing. "I have been companion to many; but there were none like dear little Kate and she —"

Miss Blot raised her hands and eyes heavenwards, and tears gathered in her eyes and fell on her hands before she was able to whisper, "Hyde Park Corner — run over — all over in a minute!"

I hastily told her of our dogs in the country — one black, one white, one brown; of their ways, their kindnesses, their understandingness. She nodded her head as if to say she had experienced all three.

"And now," she said, "if not about dogs, to what do I owe the pleasure of this visit? My eyes are not what they were, but knitting or crochet —"

I said I wanted nothing but to be allowed to come and see her as a friend.

"As a friend?" she said. "How delightful that sounds. I have begun to take a purely canine interest in people which, of course, is wrong. It becomes a habit. Now tell me about yourself! Does your mother —?"

I told her I had no mother.

"No mother!" she exclaimed in a voice of shocked sympathy, "so young! I am an orphan, my dear; I don't complain."

It struck me that many at Miss Blot's age must be orphans, but I did not say so.

"I don't wish to complain," she continued, "but my life has been a sad one, in many respects. I've never been privileged, for instance, to sit in the front pew at a wedding, on either the bride's side or the bridegroom's. I've no wish to complain, but it's a fact."

What, I wondered, could constitute such a condition of things; and seeing light in the darkness of a moment before, I said, "Then you have no brothers and sisters?"

"That is exactly the case, in a nutshell — but I *had*."

She walked across the tiny room and stood in front of a picture that took up a quarter almost of the available wall-space. It was the portrait of a young woman in the heyday of youth and, perhaps, from the painter's point of view, of beauty. With her left hand she played upon a harp and with her right caressed a dog, of a very rare kind now extinct.

"It is my most treasured possession," she said. "In

fact, my only possession in the true sense of the word. It is of immense value."

"And your sister never married?" I asked.

"She died as a child," said Miss Blot, looking at me very sadly. The expression on her face was one she might have caught from some very dear and sympathetic dog.

"But —?" I said, looking at the picture, and aching to understand.

"Ah, that was an idea of my dear parents, to have her painted as she would have been if she had lived. She had, as a child, that far-away look in her eyes that portends an early translation from this to another sphere, and seeing she showed signs of great beauty, they had her painted, after her death, as she would undoubtedly have grown up. She would certainly have been musical, because I have none of my dear mother's talent. I think it must have come out in my sister — see her fingers!"

I looked at the fingers, they were very long, very white, very tapering. I looked at little Miss Blot, she was very small, very fragile, very white. There was a look of expectancy on her face and I said, "I wonder what your sister would have worn *if* she had married."

"There could have been no 'if' about it. She would most certainly have married and would have worn white moiré silk, of course!"

Miss Blot drew her chair nearer mine. "And how particular she would have been! You can see it in her face, can you not?"

I nodded. Miss Blot drew her breath inwards expressing a gentle ecstasy. "Her husband would have

been very wealthy; he must have been. She would never have filled the position of a poor man's wife. Her elegance! Her *savoir faire!*"

"Impossible!" I said.

"Take her stockings alone! From Paris! As fine as gossamer; very extravagant!"

"Her feet were very small?" I ventured.

"Tiny!" said Miss Blot, showing me how small; her forefinger serving as a measure, with something over to spare.

"Delicious!" I exclaimed; then added, "You would have been in the front pew!"

"Of course I should! But," she paused, a hand uplifted, "why not bridesmaid?" Her hand went up to her cameo brooch.

"Bridesmaid, of course," I said.

"You see how difficult it is to get into a front pew at a wedding! There's only one certain way, of course, and that is out of the question."

"A mother?" I suggested.

"Yes; but we don't speak of these things."

She smiled, then said gently, "In flights of imagination one must keep within prescribed limits."

I asked her if she often pretended.

"*You* call it that?" she said. "Of course my whole life is one long pretend. I have the most wonderful meals — never two days the same. My clothes!"

She held up her arms as if to exclaim at the beauty of her dresses.

"The halls I go into, when I deliver up my little dogs, are all boudoirs, hung in apple-green silk. I have delightful talks with people I only know by sight. I

feel I know them intimately. They number among them the Prime Minister!"

Impressed, I asked what he talked about.

"Nothing; he never says a word! He says he loves to hear me talk — To be perfectly honest, I have n't the slightest idea what a Prime Minister talks about; so I get out of it in that way!"

I said, did n't they talk very much as other people talked?

And Miss Blot said, "Hardly! They would n't be in the position they are in if they did! They must be so careful what they say! In any case, I leave it like that. I like to think I'm worth listening to, and since it does n't deceive anyone but myself, it does n't matter."

"May I come again?" I asked. "Please let me, Miss Blot!"

"I shall count the days; but will you forgive me — you will, I know, I can see it in your face. To my canine clients my name is Blot. To my friends my name is pronounced 'Be' — like the French 'de' — then 'Lo,' with a circumflex over the 'o' — 'Be-lô!'" She formed the sound daintily with her lips and I said it after her.

It was with difficulty I tore myself away from my little friend. She was surprised to hear it was a husband who might be waiting for me at home, and said she would certainly not be the one to separate husband and wife.

When I got home Christopher was waiting for me. I was longing to tell him all about Miss Blot; but he said he had something of greater importance to talk

about. I doubted it. But I sat down prepared to listen. As he sat down beside me on the sofa he looked very serious.

"What were you doing last Friday?" he said very earnestly.

I asked him to wait while I got my little book. I fetched it.

"Last Friday: I went to tea —"

"No, in the morning."

"Oh, in the morning I went to Harrod's, and I remember! I drove Buttercup's sister up and down Bond Street and then to Woolland's because there were no taxis."

"Buttercup's sister?"

"Yes, the lovely one, Christopher!"

"Priscilla!"

"Yes," I said.

He took my hand and began slipping my wedding-ring up and down my finger. I begged him not to take it off.

"Will you ever grow up, Priscilla?"

I shook my head; it seemed very improbable.

"I heard this afternoon at the Club, that you had been seen driving with — Junella."

"Who?" I said. "Never!"

"But you were. It's quite true."

It evidently was and Christopher told me Junella was n't Buttercup's sister at all, and that perhaps was not her worst fault.

"Christopher!" I said. "Don't! She was so lovely —she must be good!"

"I must tell you these things, darling; if you are

such a child that you can't see things for yourself, I must tell you!"

There was a terrible silence. All that was best in me was struggling for the soul of Junella. I must save her. A month at Dell would probably do it. "Christopher," I said, "is it possible I may have done her some good? Would n't people think, perhaps, that if she drove with dowdy, good Mrs. Jerrold, she must really be quite good herself? Then there's your reputation, no one could think anything bad of you! They might think she was *your* friend, Christopher!"

"Heaven forbid!" he said, looking, all the same, a little pleased.

"Might n't it be, Christopher, a turning-point in her life? To be thought good goes such a long way towards making one so. She said she felt as if she had been to church."

"The question is what harm has it done you to be seen with her."

"Oh, Christopher, my dowdiness nothing could shake."

"Priscilla, Priscilla, I think the sooner we go back to Dell the better; the country is the place for us!"

"Yes, yes, but Junella; she thanked me for being so kind to her; said I had done her so much good, more than she could say, more than I could imagine."

"There is a good deal more than you can imagine."

"Why, when she is so beautiful, does she like Buttercup?"

"He is going, some day, to be what is called the richest commoner in England."

"D' you suppose Junella knows that? She looks very well off herself."

Christopher said nothing. I wondered if he was really angry with me. He continued to look at me very seriously, as if he wanted to say something and did n't like to say it.

Then, drawing nearer, he said, "What was she like to talk to; not a lady, of course!"

"Well," I said, "I don't think a lady would have eyes *quite* so big."

"What an absurd person you are!" he exclaimed.

In reality I think he was a little distressed to find he had been caught interested. "I saw Danby to-day," he said. "He wanted to know when we were coming back. He wants us to go to them in Scotland."

"No, no, no, Christopher; please, please, please. Let's go to Dell and stay there for the rest of our unnatural lives!"

XVII

LIFE was becoming increasingly difficult.

If I spoke kindly to a young man he promptly asked me to call him by some absurd nickname.

If I offered to drive a woman ever such a little way, she turned out to be the kind of woman Christopher would rather I did n't drive with. I was no good in London. I wanted the country where one walks between hedges and says, "This is a lane; on either side there are banks, above is the blue sky." Neither the lane nor the hedges nor the sky can be mistaken for anything else, unless for a foretaste of heaven! The clouds are clouds, the rainbow, a rainbow! The cows that pass slowly on their way are cows and do not pretend to be other than they are or better. Some are bad, some are good, some brown, some white, some a little of all. Old Brown, who drives them, is known to be bad. Dear old Brown, he would be better if he knew how; but he does n't; neither did his father before him, and these things are hard to live down in a village. But he is kind to animals and the cows don't trouble themselves about anything else.

Old Sarah Hawthorn, on the other hand, is a saint and old Brown, sinner, knows it, and he goes of an evening and saws wood for her against the coming of a hard winter. It does n't do the saint's wood any harm and it keeps the sinner out of the public-house.

I wanted the simplicity of the country, where everything is marked in plain figures. I wanted its children.

There seemed no get-at-able children in London. I wanted real children. I started off in quest of them. I wandered a long way and found myself, at last, in the slums of Westminster. I walked on, making for the Embankment.

At last I reached the river. Tired out, I looked for a seat.

In the distance I saw one and was astonished at the number of people it accommodated. As I got nearer I discovered that under a number of children sat buried a curate. Children of all ages clambered over him. Some had their arms round his neck. Others climbed on his knee. Above them all rose on the summer air the cadences of a charming voice, reading what were to me familiar and much-loved words from Robert Louis Stevenson's "Child's Garden of Verses."

At the end of each line the voice stopped and the missing word was given by a dozen little voices — triumphantly.

I stood fascinated, looking at them, and felt a lump in my throat.

"Make room for the lady," said the voice, and the little creatures edged nearer the reader and I sat down.

A little hand was held out to me and I was drawn into the group.

"'E tells one of his own lighter on," said the little creature of the helping hand.

The curate read on and finally closed the book.

"Now!" said the children.

A hush fell upon the little group. The children settled down in silence, wriggling into their positions as children do when they are pleased and expectant. The

man who had read Stevenson so beautifully began to tell a story. It had evidently found its beginning long before. The silence that fell upon the children fell upon me and wrapped me in its folds. Thoughts not entirely suggested by the story engrossed me. Tears not called up entirely by the story filled my eyes. I was face to face with something I had never met, something marked in figures plainer than I had ever read. I loved Stevenson's poems; I had read them to children often enough, but not to children like these. Those I had read them to had loved them as one of the many delights they every day enjoyed. To these children they opened a gate into another world.

I would of all things be the man who had opened to those children that gate.

The voice of the story-teller grew softer and softer as the end of the story drew near. I could hear the hushed breathing of the children. They seemed to be listening with their eyes; with their lips parted, seemed to be drinking in the words.

Then there came a silence, and with a deep sigh a child moved.

"She won't go and doy, will she?"

"Garn," said another child, "Mr. Bites don't do that — do you?"

"Now, children," said the curate, "'I think when I read that sweet story of old,' very, very softly, so that no one but this lady can hear."

"And Gawd," said one child, shyly, his tongue in his cheek.

"And God," said the curate; "the faintest whisper reaches him."

"My grandfaver's deaf," said another child, "'shout as yer loike!"

"Children!"

Softly under their breath they sang the hymn and the tears that had blinded my eyes fell.

"Now, children," said the curate, "scoot!"

As if frightening away a flock of sparrows the young man clapped his hands, and laughing, the children went away; one hugging its ninepin doll, another dragging its empty reel. The child who had drawn me into the circle surreptitiously stooped and kissed the tail of the curate's coat.

"Don't be sorry for them now," he said, turning to me; "they're as happy as possible; it's later, when they get older —"

"Do you do this often?" I asked.

"No; only on Thursdays."

"Every Thursday?"

"Yes, every Thursday; there is much more than a week between the Thursdays in the life of a child — you remember that? These children know their Stevenson by heart."

I said I should hardly have thought they would have understood it.

"A child's heart is the same all the world over. They must understand it. Therein lies the genius of Stevenson. Are you fond of children?"

I said I loved them, surprised that one who must love them himself could ask the question.

"Have you time to come with me? I know some delightful children — clean children, you need n't be afraid, that's not fair, is it. Their mother is very ill,

poor little things. The nurse is worn to a shadow. Will you come and amuse them? You have time? Good!"

Wondering whether this was a new adventure, I followed him to the Underground Station.

"Where I want to take you is close to South Kensington Station. It is good of you."

It was not exactly good. I felt impelled to do it, perhaps by curiosity.

We went by train, this curious young man and I. "What," I thought, "if I should meet Christopher!" One day up Bond Street with Junella, the next in the Underground with a curate. Surely the one should counterbalance the other. For all the curate knew, I might be a dancer!

A short walk from South Kensington Station brought us to a Square garden. Against the railings were pressed four little faces watching for someone; which "someone" turned out to be the curate.

"Here we are," he said gaily.

"You are late," said four voices.

"And I can't stay, but I've brought this kind lady to play with you!"

"Grown-ups don't have time to play, do they?" asked one child.

"This one has," he said, "because, you see, she is n't really grown up."

I felt it my duty to protest.

"This is Michael," he said, "Elizabeth, Peter, and Christine."

"How d' you do, Peter?" I said to Michael with deliberate intent.

"No, that's Michael," I was corrected.

"How stupid of me!" I exclaimed. "How do you do, Elizabeth?" to Christine.

There were shrieks of laughter. "That's not 'Lizabef," and one small person seized his tunic and danced round and round with delight.

"How stupid of me; I must begin again. How do you do, Christine?" to Elizabeth.

"You'll be all right," said the curate; "go on as you have begun; thank you so much. They're the jolliest little beggars. But don't ask Peter if he's going to be a bishop, that's all!"

He went off and the children did not notice his going, so engrossed were they with me and my stupidity.

"Now which is this?" said Michael, pointing to Peter.

"Which is me?" said a delicious creature about three. She waited, looking dreadfully anxious.

"Christine!" I said.

"No," she said with delight. "It's 'Lizbef. *Now*, which is me?"

I hugged her and she said, "Do some more — go on saying which is." It was the happiest time I had spent since I had come to London.

"Will you tell us a story?" they all said.

"What about?" I asked.

"About monkeys and lions and those other things like monkeys, only bigger, and about where the man did n't know they were, and they threw things. Then when the man wanted things to eat *he* threw things and they threw cocoanuts — you know!"

They settled round me on the seat and I thought

of those children I had so lately seen on the seat on the Embankment. I looked at rosy Elizabeth and thought of the child who had drawn me into the circle; of her little hand and of Elizabeth's dimpled hand. I looked at beautiful Michael and compared him with those boys; then at Peter and Christine. "Oh! go on," they said.

"Who was that clergyman?" I asked.

"He was n't one. He was Mr. Smiley — go on!"

I was surprised. Smiley was not the name the other children had given him.

"I don't think I know a story about monkeys," I said.

"Oh, do go on, please go on — can't you make one up?"

I told them one that was mostly true about our ponies when we were children.

"Is it true?" they asked.

"Yes," I said.

"Every single bit?"

"Yes, nearly every single bit," I said.

"Is n't it every single bit — could n't you make it? If you can't, just go on; we like true stories, only they can't always be, not grown-ups' stories." Thus sadly did they accept the inevitable.

Again they nestled down; Elizabeth curled up in my arms.

"Did n't you ever whip the pony when he would n't go?" asked Peter.

"No, it was n't any good because it only reared."

"I've seen a horse rear — ever so high! like this." Peter was on all fours, then up in the air, rearing.

"That's just like," said Christine kindly. "Go on, please," to me.

"It was n't a bit," said Michael; "I saw it, too."

"Where was it outside?" said Peter.

"Winter's shop," said Michael; "so there!"

"Go on, oh, do go on, for goodens sake!" murmured Elizabeth.

"I can draw," said Christine suddenly.

"Can you? What can you draw?"

"Shall I go and fetch it to show you?"

"No, mother," whispered Michael, a finger to his lips.

"I can go as softly as anything," said Christine.

"May she?" I said.

"If she creeps, she may! Nannie said if we wanted anything we might come; if we came as softly as anything."

"Softer than anything," said Peter. "*Much.*"

"Is mother very ill?" I asked.

Michael nodded. "Father nearly cried yesterday," he said softly.

My arm stole round Michael and he nestled against me. "We have n't seen mother for heaps of days. I cry when I go to bed."

"Tho I did once, lots of times," said Elizabeth, nodding wisely.

"Darlings!" I said.

"Will you come and play with us often?"

"Yes, often."

"On Sundays, too?"

"Yes, to-morrow is Sunday."

"We have n't been read to for two whole Sundays."

Christine had come back. She could n't find her

book, but she had brought some paper and a pencil. "Can you draw something?" she asked, putting her arm through mine.

I hesitated to say I could, but hastened to make the necessary effort.

"What is it supposed to be?" asked Christine, anxious to arrive tactfully at a knowledge that did not burst upon her as a revelation.

"It's a dog," I said, putting my head on one side and half closing my eyes, in the vain hope that the drawing might perhaps take the form of some kind of dog. A vain hope!

"It is n't very like, is it?" she said. "But p'r'aps it's a dog no one has ever seen except you"; she clasped her hands together in quiet ecstasy. It was a brilliant inspiration and testified to the kindliness of Christine's nature. I said I thought it must be and she gave a sigh of relief. She had got out of a difficulty and the woman within her breathed again. I felt sure she would some day shine as a social light.

"Was it really like that?" said Peter, with wrinkled nose, returning anxiously to the scrutiny of the dog picture.

He evidently thought it a dog to meet in broad daylight and in the company of other boys.

"Like what?" I asked.

"Its tail. Was it *really* like that?"

I looked at Peter's face. I saw the sweep of eyelashes on his cheek. I drew back and my attention centred itself on that bit most delicious in boys, the bit at the back of the head, just in the hollow where the hair grows so neatly.

"Did it jump up?" said Christine.

"When you thaid your palayers," asked Elizabeth, shocked and serious. "Toby did once when I was, and Nannie said 'Down.'"

"Elizabeth can't talk very well," said Christine gravely. "She can't write — not the teeniest bit. She thinks she can, but she can't."

"Do you know your alphabet, Elizabeth?" I asked.

There was a silence. There are some things none of us like to be asked about. The more obscure the name the less we like it. Elizabeth frowned.

"Do you know A, B, C, D?" I asked rather hastily.

"I know A, B, C," said Elizabeth, "but I don't know much about D." Her shyness, as she made this awful admission, was delicious.

"No, but *truthfully*," said Michael, returning to the wretched dog, "did you positively *know* it was a dog — did it come when you called like dogs do — or did it go away like dogs never will?"

"I should n't want it to come," said Peter; "I should say 'Go away.'"

"Did it?" said Elizabeth.

"Let me see," said Peter.

"No, me."

The children fought for the book.

"Did you really see it?" said Peter.

"Not really," I said.

"There, I knew," he said, shrugging his shoulders. "Grown-ups can't draw very well — at least not always."

The nurse at this moment joined us. She looked at me.

"You've got your lessons done early to-day," she said kindly, gathering up her children and shooing them before her just as some women drive chickens, to the manner born.

"Yes," I murmured, wondering what she meant. Did she think me a girl still at school?

As I walked to the Underground Station I decided that she had thought me a governess.

XVIII

THE following day was Sunday and I had promised to read to the children. Christopher was away. He was always away, leaving me to find my feet socially, and was pleased to imagine them safely and firmly planted on the lower rungs of the ladder. On this Sunday, he, no doubt, thought I was lunching with some of my newly made acquaintances. As a matter of fact by eleven o'clock I was on the chocolate-coloured garden seat, waiting with impatience for Elizabeth, Michael, Peter, and Christine.

Precisely at ten minutes past the hour the green hall-door opened and out rushed the children, all clean and clothed in their Sunday simplicity.

"What are you going to read to us?" said Michael, sitting down beside me. "I can go through," he added, alluding to the space between the seat and the back of the seat.

"Tho I can," said Elizabeth, making the perilous attempt.

"I am sure you all could," I said, "but none of you will, because —"

"It's Thunday," said Elizabeth, pursing up her lips and rounding her eyes.

"Yes, it's Sunday."

"Why is it?" said Elizabeth, wriggling.

I took the book Peter offered me and opened it at a lesson on St. John the Baptist.

"Who was John the Baptist, children?" I asked.

It seemed a good opening and a leading question.

Out shot Peter's arm.

"Yes, Peter!" I said, laying a restraining hand on Michael's knee. He was longing to wrest the words from Peter's lips.

"A fourwheeler," Peter said, shrinking at the waistline.

"Pe—ter!" exclaimed the children.

"Tho he wath," said Elizabeth. "Mummy thaid tho."

In order to distract the attention of the children from Peter I drew it to the postage-stamp on Elizabeth's knee. "What's that, Elizabeth?" I said.

"It's for fear she's lost," volunteered Michael. "Nannie tries to wash round, but she can't, so daddy gives Elizabeth a new stamp; he often does. He says it's frightfully expensive."

"But he'd rather spend lots of money than lose Elizabeth," said Christine kindly.

"Tho he would," said Elizabeth, wriggling; "he thaid tho," she continued, wriggling with joy. Hers was a statement unchallengeable.

"He thaid tho," she repeated. "He thaid tho," — this very loud; "he thaid tho," — this louder still.

"Now, children!" I said, "am I reading or am I not?"

"Not!" they exclaimed with one voice.

"Peter cwied yethterday," said Elizabeth, turning her limpid eyes upwards, then quickly down again.

No one paid any attention to this, so she clambered up on the seat and putting her arms round my neck whispered the news. It tickled frightfully.

I was obliged to take some notice now. "What did he cry about?" I asked.

Peter swung his legs backwards and forwards and said nothing.

"I don't believe he did," I said.

"Yes, he did," said Christine; "but it was only about what he always does."

"And what's that?" I asked. I felt sure it was about his mother's illness. I longed to comfort him. Children say so little about what they most feel. "What was it, Peter?" I said, putting my arm round him.

"It's nothin', only I hate 'em."

"Hate what?" I asked, leaning down till my head was on a level with his.

"It's nothin'," he whispered.

"It's only bishops," said Christine; "he does n't like them — he's seen them in church, and Michael says Peter's got to be one, and Peter says he has n't; that's all!"

It must have been, to a small boy, a tremendous all.

"Peter ought to know," I said; "I should n't worry, Peter."

"I don't like them," he said, "and I won't be them."

"Must people be things if they don't want to?" asked Michael wistfully.

"Bishops?" I asked.

"Anything."

"No, they need n't be anything if they don't want to be."

"Sometimes they've got to be things if their father

says," said Christine thoughtfully, her chin in her hands, her elbows on her knees. It was the least kindly thing she had said.

"Sometimes," I admitted. "Now, children, I am going to read to you, so be quiet."

"I are!" said Elizabeth, popping her finger into her mouth.

"Don't do that, darling," said Christine, "and be quiet."

"You be!" said Peter.

"Be quiet, Pe—ter," said Michael.

"Shut up!" said Peter.

"Children!" I said.

I read them the story of the widow and the cruse of oil. Seeing them quite unimpressed, I said, "Don't you think it was *very* wonderful, children?"

"Not so very," said Peter; "any conjurer could do it."

I hailed with relief a figure that was plainly making its way towards me across the grass. My relief turned to panic when I discovered how familiar a figure it was.

"Uncle Dan! Uncle Dan!" cried the children.

It was Lord Danby.

I bent my head lower and lower until I was sure that nothing but the crown of my hat could be visible. I felt he was not the man to rest until he knew what was under the crown of any hat. His was a nature slow to despond, yet many a crown must have held for him a bitter disappointment.

In the course of a few seconds he made me, on some pretext or other, look up. "You!" he exclaimed; "you!"

He caught Elizabeth up and sat her on his knee. "D' you know these little beggars?"

"Only just lately," I said.

"Only since yesterday," said Michael.

"Has this kind lady been reading to you?" Lord Danby asked.

"She's not a lady," said Michael indignantly.

"Not old enough, eh?" and Lord Danby laughed.

"I must go," I said. "Good-bye, children, good-bye!"

"No, no," from a sense of politeness, they cried, then turned to the all-engrossing uncle. Seeing him with them, made me think that with his love for children Daphne should have made a better thing of their married life. "Yes, yes, I'll stay," he promised; "if that cruel lady runs away from me, what can I do?"

"Vun up and give her a hug yike vis," said Elizabeth.

I saw Lord Danby's hat on the ground. I guessed how dishevelled his hair was, and knowing he would n't mind either his hat or his hair so long as he had Elizabeth in his arms, I again felt that Daphne might be to blame.

I escaped very easily. My eyes filled with tears; it was the last I should see of the children. It was impossible I could come again. At any moment Lord Danby might open the garden gate. A gate that had so recently opened to admit immense happiness into my life was closed.

As I was hurrying from the Square, coming in at the gate I was making for, I met an old lady. From her face

radiated the extreme loveliness of her soul; but for all that she was trying to open the garden gate with a penny.

"I have a key at home," she said, "and, as you will guess, sons."

"Is that how they open the gate?" I asked.

"Once upon a time unless the weather was too hot, they did," she said. "There!" as with a note of triumph in her voice she pushed open the gate and dropped her penny. Out of the ground, as it were, rose a little boy to recover it, and she smiled at him just as she had smiled at me.

"That's only fair," she said. "Poor little chap!"

My newly made friend was so beautiful that I looked again and again to see if she was really as lovely as I had at first thought her.

It was then I realised that with real beauty age has nothing to do. I wondered why Daphne should dread old age, as I knew she did, if she could become like this; if by going on peacefully and hopefully she could attain to this state of perfection. Then I realised that apart from beauty of feature this old lady had just what Daphne would never have.

"I know you by sight, my child," said my companion. "You have been reading to the little Burtons. Their mother is so ill. Do you know her?"

I said I did n't.

"You must when she is better. She is a creature one cannot afford not to know, and your face would do her good! You must know her."

"I wish I knew you," I said impulsively, and a moment later regretted having said it, which I need not have done.

"You do know me — and my worst side! I have fraudulently entered the garden. Won't you walk with me now that I am here?"

I said I must go. I looked quickly round to see what Lord Danby was doing; he was engrossed with the children. "I must go," I said.

"Then you must come in with me first. I live in the Square — two doors from the Burtons. You must come and see my children. Are you what is called 'out'?"

I said I was married.

"You found the right man very early, my child."

My heart went out to her with a rush. "How do you know?" I asked.

"I know! I know! Men, when they are nice, are so nice"; and she sighed.

She must all her life have found men very nice, of that I was sure. I followed her across the road. I waited while she spoke to the milkman, I followed her up the steps of the house and noticed that she gave the bell two sharp decisive little rings.

"Our parlourmaid," she said, "is not young; she has been with us twenty-five years; and hurrying is not good for her. I ring like that and then she knows there is no need to hurry. Dear thing, she has not been long!" — this as the door opened.

The parlourmaid greeted us with a radiant smile.

"Has anyone been, dear Front?" asked my newly found friend.

"Yes, ma'am, that lady came — dear me, I forget her name — you know, ma'am; she comes with that other lady — dear me, I shall forget my own name

next. You know it as well as I do — I have taken notes for you — she lives in that street out of — that square, you know!"

"Don't hurry, Front, it will come all in good time. Did she leave any message?"

"Yes, ma'am. Will you lunch there to-morrow, and will you let her have an answer without fail, because that other lady —"

"Try and remember by half-past six, Front; it is now a little before one o'clock."

My friend looked at her watch and Front opened a door, I imagine the dining-room door, and evidently looked at a clock, for she said with a sigh that it wanted two minutes to the hour.

"There's plenty of time, Front. Are the young ladies in?"

Front said they were. By her expression of thankfulness one might have supposed they were habitually lost.

We went upstairs; as we turned the corner I heard the sound of many voices. I drew back.

"No, dear, it's only the family and probably the dear Hopes. What is your name?"

I told her.

"Mine — ours — is Home; pronounced as it is written — not Hume."

She opened the drawing-room door to be greeted by a dozen voices. "Darling," "Angel," "Beloved," "Precious," "Most exquisite of Mortals"! No wonder, I thought, her face wears a look of ecstatic happiness.

"And who is this lovely creature?" said one voice;

to this day I don't know to whom it belonged. But it was very embarrassing.

"This is Mrs. Jerrold," said Mrs. Home. "I made friends with her in the garden. She knows the Burtons; here, dear!"

Mrs. Home drew me down on to the sofa. I sat beside her and she introduced to me her married daughter. The daughter had a little of her mother's beauty and perhaps something of her charm. I could imagine the mother's friends disputing it. While she talked to me she held her mother's hand. It was evident they had been separated some hours.

Then I was introduced, by Mr. Home, I imagine, to Mr. Laurence, his son-in-law. "He's very clever," said Mr. Home.

It was Mr. Laurence's turn to look embarrassed. I was bewildered. It was the first time I had ever been in such an atmosphere; but I found it very pleasant.

Everyone talked to me as if they loved me, not only now, but as if they had loved me for years and would continue to do so for ever, no matter what I did.

When the gong sounded for luncheon, the crowd thinned a little. But there still remained a fairly large party. I again said I must go.

"No, my child," said Mrs. Home, "not just as I have found you."

She laid her hand on mine and somehow or other I had no wish to go.

"Mary Howard is coming," said Mrs. Laurence.

"Oh, dear Mary, we won't wait for her. She has in all probability found a blind man and has taken him home to Shepherd's Bush."

"Does Mrs. Howard live at Popham?" I asked as we sat down to lunch.

"D' you know Popham?" asked a dozen voices.

The hall door bell rang.

"Don't hurry, Front," said Mrs. Home; "Mrs. Howard understands."

Front smiled and said it was on the flat, and pranced away as gaily as possible.

In all eagerness I awaited the entrance of Mrs. Howard; I was longing to find her as beautiful as Mr. Grey said she was. I was prepared to love her. I was in the right atmosphere. There would be nothing strange to these people if I expressed love for anyone at first sight. It would be expected of me.

The door opened and Front said, "Lord Danby!" with a smile as much as to say, "Is n't this nice?"

He was evidently a great favourite. I was caught, with an empty chair beside me!

He was so taken up with greeting Mrs. Home, in answering her questions about his sister, Mrs. Burton, that for a moment he did not see me. In that moment I hoped that the colour in my cheeks had flamed and died.

"Mrs. J —" said Mrs. Home.

"You — you!" he said, slipping into the seat beside me. "I never expected this."

He may have seen my embarrassment, for he turned to Mrs. Home and said I was a very near neighbour of theirs. "Not Pr —" Mrs. Home began to say, when he interrupted her.

"Yes, Priscilla. You have heard Daphne speak of her? She's been so kind to the children next door. I

should have lunched with them, by the way, but Elizabeth had made me a jam tart and I simply could n't! Young monkeys; I told Michael I was going to give him a birthday present, and he said, 'Well, what?' I said I would n't tell. 'Is it a knife?' he asked. And I said, 'No.' I remembered I was his godfather and just in time said, 'A Bible,' and he said, 'Oh, please don't! I've read it.' Peter's a nice little chap. His nurse tells me he was put to bed for his morning sleep the other day, and when she went into the room, a few minutes later, she found the young rascal sitting up in bed, so she says, 'What are you doing, Peter!' 'I'm goin' to think,' says Peter. 'What are you going to think about?' says Nannie, which shows her to my mind to be the right sort of nannie. 'I'm goin' to think about the Merry Widow, God, and my dinner.' What d' you think of that?" asked Lord Danby.

We all thought it very nice. Nicer than the story was the kind consideration Lord Danby had shown me in telling it. The next welcome distraction came when Mr. Home asked Front if she had had a good sermon? Front, with a vegetable dish in each hand, proceeded to give a short résumé of the sermon, emphasising those points she had agreed with and those with which she had very reluctantly been obliged to disagree. Mr. Home said it had evidently been a very excellent sermon, which Front admitted.

"But not one of his best, sir, and I took my brother from Yarmouth."

Lord Danby winked at one of the Home sons and was going to ask Front if he was really a brother from

Yarmouth, when Mrs. Home laid her hand on his and said, "Dear Danby, let her hand the vegetables!"

After luncheon we went upstairs and left the men to smoke. Here, I knew, was my chance. Mrs. Home did all she could to keep me; but I was firm. If I stayed, Lord Danby would offer to see me home. I could not risk seeing him alone. "You will come again?" Mrs Home said, and I knew I should not dare. "Some day, dear?" she said, and I said, "Some day!"

Everything I did ended in disaster. The next day I sought the solitude of Kensington Gardens and I found the curate. With him I felt no apprehension of danger. We had together played with children, which makes for friendship, and I felt I knew him better than many people I had known for years. We sat down on a seat and he began to talk more intimately than I should have expected, more personally. He got on to the subject of marriage, a subject which tends to intimacy, and it struck me with horror that if the children's nurse had thought me a girl he might think me unmarried. I allowed him to say his work was his bride — I think he said that. To have stopped him short of that would have seemed a little ambiguous; then thinking and fearing he might be trying gently and tactfully to break to me that he was not a marrying man, I thought I had better tell him I was married. The question was how to do it quite naturally.

"I am married," I said very gently; "most happily," I added, feeling as I said it as if I were a housemaid describing a new situation.

He turned and faced me and crossed his legs. One

arm he rested on the back of the seat. His fingers were locked together. His hands looked nervous and sensitive. I imagined them locked tensely.

"Of course," he said, "I know that, Mrs. Jerrold."

I hope I did not show the surprise I felt, nor the relief. I asked how he knew and he said Geoffrey Bayes had told him.

"You know him?" I asked.

"We were at Winchester and Oxford together."

I asked how he knew Mr. Bayes knew me? The curate unlocked his hands, turned in his seat, leaned forward, and proceeded to gaze intently at the gravel path. "When I told him, by chance, — I mean in talking, — that you came and sat down on the seat on the Embankment and spoke to the children, the dirty children, dear things, he said, 'That must have been Pr— Mrs. Jerrold.'"

"I wonder why?" I said.

"I wonder!" said the curate. "Bayes was always curiously intuitive."

I said I was afraid there must be something rather peculiar about me and the curate said nothing. But he looked to see, and I blushed under the directness of his gaze. Then, feeling the situation to be a little strained, I smiled.

"Is your name 'Smiley' or 'Bites'?" I asked.

"I could not do with either," he answered.

"The children in the Square called you 'Smiley' and the children on the Embankment called you 'Bites.'"

"I labour under the name of Bates."

"The children on the Embankment were nearer the truth," I said.

"They are the Truth," he said unexpectedly, and with fervour.

I grew uncomfortable. Just as Peter disliked bishops, I began to feel a distaste for curates. I was miserable in London. I had tried children and curates. A woman may be supposed, with perfect safety, to find solace in both or either. But in my case Lord Danby stood at the gate of the children's garden. On the Embankment, and in Kensington Gardens, sat a curate.

I went to Christopher that evening and told him I could no longer stand London.

He looked at me earnestly. "I don't like the look of you, Priscilla."

"I'm sorry, Christopher, you should have discovered that three years ago."

"Three years ago the Priscilla I now see did n't exist."

I smiled, but Christopher said it was no good. It was n't three hundred pounds' worth.

"Don't tease," I said, putting out my hand.

Christopher took it and before I knew what he was doing he had his finger on my pulse; his watch in his hand. When a woman gives her hand to the man she loves and he feels her pulse, the romance of life is gone for ever.

"Colonel Presley is coming to lunch to-morrow," he said, walking to the window and looking out. I said I had never heard of him and Christopher said he might, for all that, exist.

He came. Anyone less like a colonel, I never saw. He had shaggy eyebrows, under the canopies of which eyes burned, eyes which looked as if their owner lived on live birds.

I felt his eyes drilling holes through me. He looked more than anything like a dissenting minister, which he certainly was not. He drank port wine after lunch and held the glass to the light in a way that no dissenting minister could do, or should do, without its costing him the confidence of his congregation.

"Why do you smile like that?" he said, looking at me.

I felt impelled to tell him why; but while making up my mind how to begin, he said, "No woman smiles like that without some very good reason."

I said, supposing it was solely from happiness?

"Is it? Are you happy?"

"Of course I am. If I were not, there is my three hundred a year!"

"What's that to do with it? It's worth more than that in the open market."

I told him the story of Lady Ventnor. The burning eyes grew softer, the rugged face assumed a kinder, a tenderer look.

"Tell me some more," he said.

I told him about Dell and the people in Dell. I told him about Aunt Jolly.

He said that accounted for it. I asked him, for what? And he laughed.

"You love children?" he said.

"Of course I do!"

"Um, you really love them? By loving children I mean other people's children?"

"Of course! If I did n't, what children should I love?" Then I said, "Don't you love them?"

"I? Of course. But for all that, I should like to buy

them at my price and sell them at their mothers'. Do you play with children? Like to have them round you?"

I said I loved it. I told him about the children on the Embankment.

His eyes filled with tears. "And you were happy? or unhappily happy, perhaps?"

With those, I admitted, I was a little unhappy; but there were the Square children. I told him about them.

"What children, Priscilla?" said Christopher; "you never told me!"

Christopher asked me to go upstairs; he and Colonel Presley would follow. Quietly I walked out of the room, softly stole down the passage, flew upstairs and took Whitaker's Peerage out of the bookcase. A colonel of that age must have crept into the volume by some means or other. The only Presley I could find was Sir George, the celebrated nerve doctor. A nerve specialist, author of a dozen horrible books. Oh, Christopher!

It was quite evident Christopher and I were at cross-purposes. He thought I was worrying over a thing I should never dream of worrying about. He could never guess what was really worrying me.

When Colonel Presley had gone, I told Christopher I did n't think much of Sir George Presley, as a doctor.

He asked me where I had heard of him?

"You ask that?" I said.

"Why not?"

"Because he floundered over the children — absolutely floundered."

Christopher asked me what I meant. That he could be so deceitful was a revelation to me.

"Was it Colonel Presley," I asked, "or was it not, who sat on that chair, and took five years' wear out of the chintz in as many minutes; Christopher, tell me?"

"Why not?"

"Well, he did n't look like a colonel."

"What should a colonel look like?"

"Anything but that."

Christopher said a man could n't help his looks. That he would pay Sir George forty times his fee if he could discover what was worrying me. I smiled. It was no good. Christopher was not to be deceived.

"I'm not suited to London," I said. "I'm the wrong shape bodily and mentally. I can't look smart. I can't talk the jargon, any jargon. I admire the wrong kind of people. I shake hands much too frequently and kiss wrong two or three times a day."

Then Christopher said the Danbys wanted us to go to them in Scotland.

"No, no, no," I said.

That seemed to settle some doubt in his mind. He said nothing and in a few minutes left the room, I imagine to write this letter which I found later on my writing-table.

"Priscilla, —

"If I tried to tell you only one thousandth part of how much I love you I should fail horribly and miserably for want of words. No words can express what you are to me. How you have wound yourself round my heart —"

"Christopher," I thought, "how delicious! We must have more misunderstandings!"

I went on reading: —

" But if I find it difficult to say in words how great is my love for you, you can, in one single act, show the height, breadth, and depth of yours for me! I ask you to trust me! Appearances may be against me. Someone may be making mischief. I cannot, at present, defend myself. I have never known you lacking in generosity. Your outlook on life has the breadth that is generally supposed to be man's. I doubt the truth of that. My experience of women is small —"

"Oh," I thought, "those six photographs!"

"But," went on the letter, "it has been wonderfully happy."

I understood. If I had found him so attractive, others must have done the same. That I had always realised.

I read on: —

" You have never failed me. A look will be enough! I shall anxiously watch for it."

I was waiting for him when he came in. I heard the rattle of his stick in the umbrella stand, his light step on the stair. I met him more than halfway and then and there I threw my arms round his neck. I did n't give him the look he asked for, because my face was buried in his shoulder. I did n't in the least know what he imagined I suspected. But that there was something was evident. And I understood enough to forgive. If anyone knew what it was to have a secret, and yet not to be to blame, I was the one. Anyhow, the air was

cleared. I love to forgive and with Christopher I have so little chance.

From that day I heard nothing about the Danbys, which made me sure Christopher's secret had in some way to do with Daphne. Of course I longed to know why he had been with her that night. Any wife would. In all probability, in all certainty, he had as little to do with his secret as I had had to do with mine. He could not explain the situation to me any more than I could explain mine to him. The world seemed a different place now that we each had a secret. It made mine a different thing altogether, and bearable. If Christopher felt justified in keeping his from me, I felt justified in keeping mine from him.

All the same, I felt the moment had come when I might produce the six photographs. Christopher had said he had had very little experience with women. I doubt that any man treasures more than six photographs.

I placed the photographs on Christopher's table in the order of their merit, as arranged in my mind, and waited anxiously to see what he would say.

So far as he was concerned the explanation was perfectly lucid and plain. The photographs were of six candidates who had applied for the post of matron at the county lunatic asylum.

XIX

THE moment I thought had come in which to tell Christopher about Miss Blot. I reminded him quite gently of my behaviour over the photographs, and hinted that to give me what I wanted would be a very graceful thing to do and a very kind thing, too.

"Well, what is it?" he asked.

I told him about Miss Blot and I said I had such a delightful idea, and that was, that she should come to Dell, should live at Lavender Cottage, and look after the babies of tired London mothers!

He had no real objection to offer. He had to allow that it was not fair on Coachman Blow that his wife should have all her time taken up with other people's babies; besides, she was foolish as it was over Liz and Blow feared for her reason if she had any more children to love. Christopher wondered if Miss Blot was the best person for the job! Dear thing! I told him the job was the best thing for her! That was the point! He gave in and I wrote to her. I suggested a change from dogs to babies; from the Fulham Road to the prettiest cottage in the village. If I exaggerated the delights of the cottage and the beauties of the babies, may I be forgiven! Perhaps it is difficult to exaggerate to one who lives in a room in a street off the Fulham Road and imagines herself in a palace.

Miss Blot's answer came in as short a time as was consistent with the "composing" of it. That the writer's hand trembled under a feeling of intense excite-

ment I was sure, and I read much between the lines. Christopher vows I could read between the lines of a typewritten letter. If it should ever be my misfortune to receive one from anyone I like, I hope I shall be able to read between the lines, because the lines themselves could convey nothing.

Miss Blot wrote: —

You dear ray of sunshine, your letter overwhelms me! I had imagined my heart to be a strong one. Since I received your letter it has done the strangest things, which, perhaps, after all, testify to its strength and not to its weakness. You ask if I understand children? Is there a woman deserving of the name, who would own she did not? If patience — and love — and kindness — and deepest gratitude towards them means understanding, then I can claim to understand them. To be perfectly and absolutely truthful, which I must be at all costs, I have had very little to do with them. But are they not, perhaps, very like dogs?

If for the first few days I put the babies' basins of bread and milk on the floor and try to tie back the babies' ears, shall I be forgiven? Those are the greatest dangers I apprehend. If for the first few days I pat the babies when they are good, shall I be forgiven? If these little errors will not prevent my accepting the office, may I express how very gratefully I shall undertake it?

Yours gratefully,

Bonnie Blot.

P.S. — When the first of the babies marries surely the privilege to sit in the front pew will be mine?

In the course of the next few weeks the cottage was painted all white within; with a dado, in the nursery, of pigs going to market, pigs staying at home, pigs doing all that little toe-pigs, from time immemorial, have been supposed to do; and outside, the cottage had been painted green; those parts of it that should be green, such as doors and gates and rainwater tubs. The bars, too, were about to be put up in two windows and a half-door was in the making — that should prevent the smaller babies from starting too early on life's adventurous journey unaccompanied — when I received another letter from Miss Blot.

Dear, kind, breezy, open-air child, —

I must decide against the cottage, the beautiful cottage, and the babies, the dear babies. The truth is I went to call upon my neighbour beneath me, and I told her, in no boastful spirit, of your offer and of my most grateful acceptance of that offer. She was terribly upset. I cannot further distress her by leaving. She says she has never had such an offer; neither would she accept it if she had; nor ought I! There is the truth in a nutshell. Nor ought I! Dear friend, until she put it to me, I had not realised my age. I feel so young that I forget I am too old — too old for anything! I must stick to my little dogs. They do not outrun my strength. I can honestly undertake the smaller species. Then, again, where should I be when the eldest of the babies came to be married? Most certainly not in my rightful place, the front pew! But asleep in the churchyard, just outside the church! The baby, as she passed my resting-place, might remember me and say, 'There

lies funny little Nurse Blot. She used to put our basins of bread and milk on the floor and tried to tie back our ears!" and the bridegroom would laugh. If he did n't he would n't be the kind of man for the baby to marry! I would n't have her made sad on her wedding-day. Here I am pretending again! Try as I will, I can't help seeing that little bride! And after all, why should n't I?

Why should n't she?

The workmen went on with the cottage; but in my eyes the green paint had lost its colour; the white its dazzling brightness. The half-door was absurd, meeting trouble halfway! The rain-tubs were too large. The prospective babies even had lost something. I was disappointed, although I was obliged to own that the nurse, chosen, later, by a select committee, was in every way very suitable. She was fresh and young and strong and looked upon children as the most natural things in the world, if not inevitable! She would never, I knew, put the basins on the floor, nor would she pat the babies when they were good.

The committee was pleased and returned a vote of thanks to everyone, and there was n't a member of the committee who did n't feel something worth doing had been done that day. And that without each one of them it would never have been done.

But I thought of little Miss Blot walking down the Fulham Road, leading the best-loved of her charges.

Christopher assured me she should never feel any anxiety about money. But even that did n't make up.

XX

THERE are some natures to whom confession comes as a relief. Such natures should seek solace in pouring out their hearts to an Aunt Jolly if they should be so fortunate as to possess one. I felt the necessity of telling someone about Lord Danby, and I chose Aunt Jolly as confessor and confidante. For one reason because the confession would necessarily be on a subject — or, at all events, border on a subject — of which she never spoke. Therefore a secret of that nature would remain a secret. I knew it would be the most worldly and terrible thing she had ever heard, but I felt the sacrifice on her part must be made. So I wrote and told her I was coming down to see her; that I had something to tell her. She wrote back to say she was always and should always be delighted to see her dear Priscilla, under any circumstances.

I went by a morning train and at one of the stations on the way down got in an old man and his elderly wife. They were evidently going somewhere for the day. There was no luggage-look of anxiety about them. The wife glanced at me and deciding, evidently, there was nothing French about me — as, indeed, there is not — she turned to her husband and said, "Est-ce que vous avez de l'argent?"

"What for?" said the husband.

"Pour le fly," said the wife, and I smiled.

I enjoyed that and was really sorry when they got out.

When I arrived at my destination I found Aunt Jolly had driven to meet me.

It would be impossible to imagine her driving in anything but a brougham. She shrinks from the publicity of a landau; a victoria would be impossible. The thought of a horse looking over her shoulder fills her with terror and apprehension. Not that she does n't love horses in their proper places, she says.

In the brougham, therefore, Aunt Jolly awaited me.

"Dear Priscilla," she said as she greeted me, "this is delightful; get in!"

Her dear face wore an expression of perplexed apprehension. It was evident she dreaded the nature of my confession. Could anything good come out of London?

She asked me to tell her at once if Ashbee had been the worse for —?

I assured her it was nothing of the kind; such a thought in connection with Ashbee was impossible.

"That is a great relief, my child! Those rosy-faced men labour under a very great disadvantage. You look just the same!"

I said it was an acute disappointment to me that she did not see an improvement.

"In clothes, dear, possibly! But my dear Priscilla does not depend on clothes. I can think of her — I mean it is her dear face I think of!"

I asked if that, perhaps, was not a little improved? I caught the reflection of it in the window which was converted by Stubbs's broad back into a very passable, if slightly distorted, mirror.

"Well, dear, it is as God made it, quite nice, quite nice." She patted my hand. "And since it gained you Richard's affection, you must rest content. You have not anything of a very painful nature to tell me?" she asked the question plaintively.

I said I was not to blame; did that comfort her?

"Slightly, my child, although in the worst sorrows of life a woman so often is not to blame — yet the blame is counted hers all the same. But yours, naturally, my child, could not be a confession of that nature."

I sighed. Aunt Jolly did not help one to confess.

We drove gently through the scented lanes, and as Aunt Jolly was quoting some lines from Wordsworth, delightfully appropriate, a motor whizzed past at a terrific pace.

"Forgive me, Priscilla," she said, when she had regained her composure, "I must speak to Stubbs."

She put her head out of the carriage window. "Stubbs!" she said.

Stubbs drew up carefully, hugging the hedge with the near wheel.

"You managed very well, indeed. I am extremely pleased at the manner in which you drove at a very difficult moment and under bewildering circumstances. Go on as you have begun and we shall have a very enjoyable drive."

Aunt Jolly backed gently through the window and off we went again.

"I think it is only right," she said, "to encourage as well as to blame. I had occasion to reprimand Stubbs for looking about at choir practice; I am thankful,

therefore, to take this opportunity of praising where praise is due."

Dear Aunt Jolly, how I loved her! She has many social gifts. She receives, with better grace than anyone I know, a gift she does n't want.

She looked that day so fragile, so pure, so childlike; was it right to pour into her ears such a confession as mine?

"I think, Priscilla," she said, "whatever you have to say we will keep for under the shade of the trees."

I told her it was exactly what I had determined.

So under the shade of a mulberry tree, I started, sustained by a jam puff brought out by the faithful Anne, to confide in Aunt Jolly.

I could have done it better without the jam puff. I doubt whether any married woman can eat a jam puff with dignity at half-past eleven in the morning. Most married women have forgotten what to do when the jam comes out the other end. And Maria's jam puffs are so much jam and so little puff.

Aunt Jolly was very nervous. She laid a hand on my knee.

"I am quick to understand, dear. You need not express too definitely in words." A little dab of raspberry jam fell on her hand which necessitated her going in to wash. The postponement, I could see, came as a relief. By the time she came out I had finished the puff, had scattered the crumbs to the birds and was waiting.

As she sat down she said, "It's a tendency of the day to speak too plainly. It is not left to the intuition of a gentlewoman to understand. . . ."

I took her hand in mine and I began a very involved story of my visit to Lord Danby. I left a vast amount to the intuition of a gentlewoman and was surprised to find how much that intuition grasped.

"Consolation is a dangerous thing to attempt in connection with the opposite sex. A man can seldom separate sympathy from a more troublesome and dangerous expression of feeling," she said.

She winced when I told her that Lord Danby had told me Richard was the best husband in the world.

"Yes, dear, don't say it! How could he suppose! Your face, Priscilla! It should have been enough! That he should not even perceive in your face what another thought worth three hundred a year, amazes me! Men seem to see in faces only what they look for. It is terrible he should have thought you came to see him!"

"It was too awful, Aunt Jolly!"

"Too, too terrible, dear; of course you can't tell Richard; that in itself is a calamity. He very naturally would be very much annoyed with Lord Danby."

I nodded. I wished I could think of him as annoyed only.

"And of course you can't tell Lord Danby, because you would have to say you had thought his wife had run away!"

"Exactly!" I said.

"Dear, dear," said Aunt Jolly, "it was very inconsiderate of Lady Danby."

"Not to run away?" I asked.

"Well, dear, so expressed it sounds strange. But it was inconsiderate of her to give the impression that

she had. Had her behaviour led you to expect she might?"

"It seems to me that some people expect it of any woman like Lady Danby."

Aunt Jolly said it seemed sad and terrible, and perhaps unjust, which was worse than anything. "And with whom did she *not* run away?"

I said she certainly did not run away with Christopher.

Aunt Jolly begged me not to be flippant. I said I had not the slightest intention of being that. But as Daphne Danby undoubtedly came back with Christopher, it was my duty to make it perfectly clear that I did not believe she had gone away with him.

"I think, my dear child, that you are a little mixed."

She was silent for a moment or two, summing up in her own mind the case. When I tried to speak, a gentle pressure of her hand on mine silenced me. At length, taking my two hands in hers, she began to speak.

She said it was quite evident to her, if Lord Danby had thought I was making love to him, that Lady Danby, associating daily with such an undefined moral sense, had undoubtedly made love to Richard, and that he, scorning her advances, had brought her home. I said Christopher would never have done that.

"Done what, my dear child?"

I said he would never have made a woman look so small as that.

"But, dear, the alternative? The more generous thing, perhaps, is to remember that, under the cloak

of chivalry towards one woman, many a man has sinned towards another."

"Christopher would never let a woman go so far as that," I said.

"Ah, dear, no man can gauge how far a woman will go — and how rapidly, once she has begun."

"Dear Aunt Jolly, what a horrible thing to suggest!"

"It's all horrible, Priscilla!"

I nodded.

Aunt Jolly went on to say that Christopher had evidently been placed in very much the position I had been placed. It was the duty of each of us to forgive the other for allowing ourselves to be so compromised. She imagined that in neither case could it have happened to people of the world. "I don't think that you are either of you suited to London."

I said I was fully aware of that; but this particular difficulty had arisen in the country and was largely attributable to moonlight. Then Aunt Jolly said it was clear that we had not sufficient occupation. Did not Christopher farm?

I said he farmed; at least, he spent so much a year in farming.

"Is he interested in cows and pigs?"

I said he was, quite strangely interested.

"They are an outlet, if not in themselves interesting."

I said we had lots of cows and pigs.

"They are not — ended — at Dell?"

"Not what, Aunt Jolly?"

"They are not — ended — dear, at Dell?"

I knew what she meant. "No, nothing is ended at

Dell; it is the happiest place in the world, or should be."

"That, dear, is what every young wife should find her home. The only way out of the difficulty I can see is for Lady Danby *to* run away!"

I said it was terrible to wish that.

"Dear, it is, but in some cases it is the more honourable course of action."

I was amazed at Aunt Jolly. There was a ring of decision in her voice I had never before heard; a strength in the grasp of her hand I had never felt. She had grown in strength physically and morally.

"You are getting amazingly like a woman of the world, Aunt Jolly," I said, stroking her hand.

"Well, dear, I'm not sure that it is n't best for a woman to become one and as early in life as possible."

"Who has been to the village lately?" I asked.

"I had not meant to tell you. A lodger came to the old Beadles. She was very beautiful and wore no collar in the daytime, which, at her age, prejudiced me, and her face was very white, which I had been brought up to think unnatural in the country. She never became sunburnt, which is not a good sign, and goes against a woman. After I had called upon her I learned that she had divorced her husband, which was certainly a shock. Anne did not break it as gently as she might have done. But finding her peculiarly susceptible to the sorrows of others and kind to widows and orphans and generous in her subscriptions, I began to think I might have misjudged her, and other women so placed, and I determined to admit her to my friendship — in order to do her what good I could!

And, dear Priscilla," — Aunt Jolly paused to give weight to the following words, — "I found it was she who did *me* good."

"Dear Aunt Jolly!" I said; "I wonder!"

"Yes, dear, undoubtedly; I went with her up to her room one day and she washed her face, with the water out of the jug! Then it was I was ashamed, and humbly I said, 'May I kiss you, my dear?' And she said, 'Wait till it's dry,' and she scrubbed her face with the towel! Yes, dear, she enlarged my views; she gave me understanding where I had only felt charity! And she took me to a matinée. I ought to have told you, dear, but as Adela was the elder I should have told her first, and that, I could not bring myself to do."

I told Aunt Jolly I knew she had been to a matinée.

"How, dear?" she said, looking quite frightened.

"Ashbee told Best."

"And how did Ashbee know?"

"I suppose he was there himself."

Aunt Jolly said she had never associated matinées with butlers.

I said I supposed very few people did. "You are too delicious, Aunt Jolly," I added.

"No, dear child, you must not exaggerate. I have gained something. But what it is I cannot yet determine. I am still shocked at things; of that I am glad. I was quite afraid, after the very pleasant intercourse with Mrs. Steel, that I might not feel a shudder at the thought of wickedness. But Miss Blane told me a story yesterday which filled me with the same horror I have always felt under similar circumstances. I

should not like to lose that most valuable of feminine qualities — in fact, *the* safeguard of women. If a woman does not shrink from the thought of sin, there comes a time when she can touch it without feeling horror. So fearful was I that my perception might be blunted that I did what I never do; I, one morning, read the police news. The horror I felt reassured me." Aunt Jolly covered her eyes with her hands. "Mrs. Steel says that sympathy for wrongdoers does not argue a lack or moral sense."

I said I thought very few sinners meant to be wicked, and Aunt Jolly implored me not to encourage them; it would be false kindness.

On going into the house I was surprised to see on Aunt Jolly's writing-table something which suggested to me stocks and shares, reports and prospectuses, things which, at times, litter the table and fill the waste-paper basket in Christopher's room.

"Shares?" I said, picking up a paper that was clearly the report of a mining company.

"Yes, dear, you would n't expect to find me interested in such literature; but it is business and a very good and excellent thing." Her face grew wistful and anxious. She looked at me appealingly.

I said of course that sort of thing often was.

"This one most particularly so, dear. See, it says —"

She put up her glasses and hurriedly glanced through the paragraphs which she seemed to know by heart. "Here, dear, it says, it has a 'capital reserve fund.' That from a body of business men means high praise."

"Of their own concern," I ventured.

"Well, dear, they would hardly be entitled to say

it of anyone else's. In business one must be so careful. 'Capital,' dear, means high praise. They might have said 'a very good' reserve fund, or 'excellent' even, but 'capital.' Such a word means enthusiastic praise."

I told her that I did n't think "capital" was used quite in that sense, that a "capital reserve fund" —

She asked me if I had come all the way from London to talk business? And I was bound to admit, not business of that nature.

After that there was a forced gaiety in her manner that I did not understand. But in almost all moods Aunt Jolly is pathetic. One cannot question any of her actions without bringing to her dear face a look of pained resignation. Her expression when a button comes off her boot is a study in temperament. She is slow to blame the button, but quick to feel the affront.

I asked her if she would like anyone to come and live with her. I suggested Miss Blane.

She said it would be impossible; she and Miss Blane did not agree about Carlyle.

I asked if he was a tradesman?

"*Thomas* Carlyle, dear! In his matrimonial difficulties we take opposite sides."

When I left Aunt Jolly that evening, she whispered at the moment of parting that she should pray for Lady Danby.

I got into the brougham, and as I leant out of the window to catch the last glimpse of her standing at the garden gate, I saw there was something new and strange about her. I wondered what it was.

Half a mile from the house Stubbs drew up at the

command of a slate-coloured cotton glove and Anne stepped into the brougham.

I told her I had tried to find her to say good-bye.

"I did n't want your dear aunt to know, Miss Priscilla."

So we sat silently, hand in hand. Anne had no need to say what she had waddled half a mile to tell me. Compared to Aunt Jolly's hand the one I now held was so strong, so big, but in tenderness of touch much the same.

"Why do you think so, Anne?" I asked.

She said she had known it some time. I asked if Aunt Jolly knew.

Anne said, "I don't know, but when she thinks she 's alone, there's a light in her face, as if it were turned that way."

"Dear Aunt Jolly!" I said.

"She 's a gentle lady, miss; she was good to you as children. I was prepared to see to that. I used to make excuses to come to the drawing-room to see if you were happy — but I had no need to."

I asked Anne if she would promise to let me know when —

"Yes, dear, I asked Dr. Freer; he said it might be some years yet, it might be sooner. You liked the jam puff? She can't do justice to them now; you want children for that. Master Bobbie 'll be back soon."

I said I had enjoyed the puff immensely.

"You always did," said Anne, "for all your innocence. I'll get out here!"

She tapped on the window and Stubbs drew up. She got out.

I asked her if she would n't drive with me all the way; but she said Aunt Jolly would be wondering.

"Mr. Ashbee well?" The question must have been uppermost in her mind for some time.

I said he was very well.

"And Maria? Best, as you call her."

"Very well."

"Won't allow it, I suppose?"

"Of course not!"

Anne laughed, and through the little window at the back of the brougham I watched her disappear.

XXI

MRS. GREY wrote saying I had promised to go to Popham for the day — if not for longer. She gave me the choice of two or three days and I chose the one that came first. I longed to see Popham. I longed to see Mrs. Howard. So on the day fixed I arrived at the station that is Popham's, and outside the station, in a donkey cart, sat Mrs. Grey. I was introduced to Ruth, the donkey. Her age, in course of time, was delicately hinted at to excuse the slowness of her going. Mrs. Grey was obliged to own that Ruth had never, even in her young days, been fast, neither had she been "risquée," which was what Baby Howard said her pony was the day it had nearly kicked her off. The real reason of Ruth's existence held the reins. The hands that held them held in their tiny hollows, not only Ruth's world, but the Greys' world. The hands measured two or three inches by two or three inches, and were dimpled and delicious. They belonged to Baby Grey, aged somewhere about two. I exclaimed, "What a darling!" and Mrs. Grey bent down and, kissing the top of a sun hat, said, "It *is* rather delicious — and clean!"

I asked her to tell me when we got to Popham itself and she said she would. She almost as good as promised that we should meet, at least, one Howard.

"And Miss Dorinda?" I asked.

That, she said, was very unlikely. Miss Dorinda was seldom to be met with on the road in the morning,

and to-day the chance was even more than usually remote, because there was to be a flower show at Great Popham, to which she with the rest of the Popham world would be going, and the excitement to Miss Dorinda would be almost greater than she could bear.

I asked Mrs. Grey if she and Mr. Grey always lived at Popham. She said what had once been her home was now their week-end cottage.

"From Friday to Monday?" I asked.

She laughed and said their week-ends were much longer than most people's. They very often ran one into the other and were still too short. At that moment Ruth stopped dead, and at the cross-roads, a yard or two to our right, I saw a pony-cart also stopped dead. Its occupant was deep in a book and, until Mrs. Grey called, paid no attention to Ruth's quiet manner of salutation.

"It's Peggy," said Mrs. Grey, quite excited;—"Howard," she added.

I leant forward in delighted anticipation. Ruth wagged her ears, and Mrs. Grey called, "Peggy!"

A wide-brimmed hat slowly rose and disclosed beneath it a face as lovely as I had expected Peggy's to be. "Christian!" she called; "what fun!"

"How long have you been here?" asked Mrs. Grey.

"I've read three chapters," she said; "it's frightfully exciting; I only hope he won't go on now. But he will, of course, if Ruth does n't; he can't bear her!"

But Ruth was browsing peacefully and the baby was making every noise it knew to persuade her to go on.

"This is Mrs. Jerrold," said Mrs. Grey. "She's come for the day."

"For the flower show?" asked Peggy.

"Not especially; but she will go, of course; she wants to see everyone, particularly Miss Dorinda."

"I met her in the churchyard — just now."

"Miss Dorinda?" said Mrs. Grey, surprised.

"Yes; she said a friend of theirs wants to take a house here for the summer, and she asked Miss Dorinda to go to the churchyard and make a list of the ages of the people who have died here in the last few years."

"Peggy!" said Mrs. Grey.

"It's true, absolutely. Good-bye!"

The pony had decided for reasons of his own to go home, and off he went.

"That's Peggy," said Mrs. Grey.

I asked if she were her favourite? She said she thought, if she had a favourite, it was Pat. He was at school. I asked Mrs. Grey why Peggy did n't make the pony go. And she said there was no known method of doing that, with safety. Discretion in that case was the better part of valour. The Howard family made a point of reading deep books with dignity, when the pony refused to go. "It is supposed, when he does go, that the victory lies with the reader."

I asked Mrs. Grey what she did before the Howards came. And she said she often wondered. "No one calls me Mrs. Grey," she added; "I am 'Christian' to all Popham."

So she became "Christian" to me. I felt none of the difficulty I had experienced in calling Miss Trant, "Cordelia." When we reached the Greys' cottage I found it had been enlarged. Christian pointed to the

baby and said, "A baby takes up much more room than a grown-up."

I said we had lovely nurseries at Dell. Christian said how delightful that was. She would like Baby Grey to grow up in the nursery in which his father had grown up; but these things don't come to every baby. "Babies don't come to every nursery," I thought, but I did not say so.

When we went round the garden I found most of it was Pat's. The stream was where Pat fished. The grass hill was where Pat rolled down. Until the Howards came, Popham evidently had no history.

Christian Grey told me, in course of time, what I had discovered for myself, and that was that if a woman has n't a baby she must have a dog; if only as an outlet for pet names. She told me a story of a man who had lost a splendid appointment because his wife had called him "sweetlums" in public, and before a very influential person. The thought made my blood run cold. If I had n't called Christopher that, I had been perilously near it.

"A woman must have something to love extravagantly, and naturally the most affectionate husband draws the line somewhere," said Christian.

I said we had three dogs. She said I should be safe, or rather my husband should. She had never heard of a woman seriously injured by being called a pet name in public — not seriously injured.

Christian said it was so amusing to watch the baby. Men were largely made from habit and it was instructive to watch a small son of his father slip into the same habits and to see how well they fitted, with a

take-in here and there — a tuck here and there — to allow for growth. She said it would be bad for a child to start life with a habit too big for him. She said, in answer to my question, that the baby was just like the other Randal Grey, less grey, of course, more pink-and-white and a little noisier. And that he got what he wanted in exactly the same way. She supposed all men did.

Having seen all there was to see in the cottage, Christian and I sat down in the drawing-room, and up the flagged path to the hall door came one of the attractions of Popham.

In the course of a moment or two Mrs. Durnford, the doctor's wife, was sitting opposite to me. She was told who I was and for what purpose, more or less, I had come.

"Married?" she snapped at me.

I said I was.

"Well, why should n't you be? My daughter is married," and she sighed.

I instantly asked if she had married a sailor. That I thought could best account for the depth of the sigh that accompanied the announcement. A wife in England with a husband in China seemed exactly to measure the depth of that sigh.

"Why a sailor?" said Mrs. Durnford. "I pity the ship that carried him!"

I grew serious. Here was a demand for sympathy. The husband drank, of course.

"The dear Tinker," said Christian; "we could n't spare him to go voyages."

"A tinker!" I thought, "a mesalliance." Perhaps

he was a travelling tinker, with wild hair and an ear for the songs of the birds, and an eye for every wild flower that grows! A poet tinker; there were possibilities in tinkers, but not as sons-in-law! I could imagine my grief if my dream Betty chose, some day, to give her tender heart into the keeping of a wild travelling tinker, because he was kind to his donkey. It would break my heart.

I suppose my eyes were growing larger and larger; anyhow, I felt very very sad, when Christian told me not to look so unhappy. He was n't a tinker; but just the nicest, kindest, most unusual man in the world! She told me how he had brought his wares to Popham and how they had all bought of his wares.

"I've no fault to find with him there," said Mrs. Durnford. "It's this baby business!"

Christian asked if the baby was ill.

"Ill?" said Mrs. Durnford. "I never saw a finer child; nor did the doctor, which says a good deal more. But the things that child is to wear or not to wear when it grows up; the things it's to eat or not to eat — the things it's to be! Be, indeed! What more does a woman want to be than a wife and mother, and she can't be either one or the other if she is n't properly clothed and nourished. Dolores, as you know, started off all queer — pendants in the middle of her forehead, and horrible dresses and queer ideas; but it came to nothing more than marriage in the end, and a baby. And why not leave well alone? She was saved by the skin of her teeth, as it were, from being peculiar; why start off again with a new generation?"

Christian soothed Mrs. Durnford by saying she

thought there was very little chance of the baby allowing her mother to be queer. Babies hated their mothers to be unlike other mothers, and would certainly lead them back into the paths of convention.

"Never!" said Mrs. Durnford. "This baby has blue eyes and a nose as soft as putty. She'll freckle as easily as I do! She's exactly what her mother would have been if I had n't taken steps to alter the natural course of things — a thing I bitterly repented doing, as you know."

Christian said she thought Mrs. Durnford had no need to be that.

"You mean if Dolores had n't been odd, the tinker, as you call him, would n't have been sorry for her and married her? Well, are you coming to the flower show?"

Christian said she was.

"Humph," said Mrs. Durnford; "how Lady Victoria is going to judge the potatoes I can't imagine. It would take an Irishman to do it and he could n't! She trades on her name. Well, good-bye, you'll bring this friend?" indicating me with a nod of the head.

"Is n't she quaint?" said Christian as she came back from seeing Mrs. Durnford out of the door. She told me that Mrs. Durnford, by means of looking at the photographs of celebrated actors, musicians, poets, according to her ideas lawless people, had so influenced the character of her baby before it was born that it had come into the world with dark, melodramatic eyes. That in obedience to her father's wish the child had been christened "Lily," but from a sense of proportion on the part of the mother had been called "Dolores,"

and was now Mrs. Melfort, with a baby, and a husband whose charm was potent, whose belief in her was touching, and who had turned most of the Popham people into flourishing capitalists. "Except the Howards," she said. I asked if they were poor. And Christian said they were just right.

She suggested we should go and see them on our way to the flower show. We went and I saw photographs of Pat in flannels, Pat bathing, Pat doing many things. If he had been Christian's own she could not have shown greater pride in him. She must, in fact, have shown less. Mrs. Howard said it was cruel to victimise me and she seized the photographs and took me round the garden. I shall never forget that walk. She talked — of what I cannot exactly remember — she said things I treasure in my heart, but cannot put into words. She asked me about Christopher in a way that made me feel how she would love him if she knew him, and how much I, knowing him, loved him. I was even able to tell her about my dream children. And I found she had just the same dreams.

"But you have real ones?" I said.

"They, too, are my dream children," she said.

She did n't ask me if I was sorry I had no children, for which I loved her. I asked her how she understood. And she gave me a rose. She called me a dear child, and I never before so acutely realised what a mother might have been.

We went to the flower show and the whole of Popham was there. I was introduced to Miss Agatha and Miss Dorinda Franklin and to Mrs. Melfort — Dolores — who was staying with her mother. I found she did not

feel nearly so much as she looked, which was a great relief to me. I saw Lady Victoria Popham and her two girls. One was married, her eldest, and as Lady Lawrence electrified the Popham world. She was very radiant and beautiful.

Lady Victoria made a charming speech all about nothing and carefully avoided any mention of potatoes, although she had adjudged a small one better than a larger one, which called for some protest on the part of Mrs. Durnford. But Lady Victoria assured her it was a question of line, not size; of form, not weight! Mrs. Durnford retired crushed but not defeated.

I was introduced to Mrs. Dare, the vicar's wife. She was best known as having had a baby that died. It had changed her from a dull, circumscribed, narrow little woman, into a large-hearted, broad-minded, and tolerant companion. It was, to my mind, too severe a measure of reform; I would have had her rather as she was before. It made me ache to see the look in her eyes that proclaimed her broad-minded, kind, and tolerant.

After the show we went to Great Popham, and as we stepped through the hall door we found ourselves in a world of luxurious comfort, where everyone was happy and did just what they liked and whatever was done was approved by everyone else. Lady Lawrence smoked a cigarette under the very nose of little Miss Dorinda and blew the smoke across her delicate little face.

Christian asked Miss Dorinda how she had got on with her list in the churchyard. And Miss Dorinda looked troubled and said it had been very difficult.

"You see, dear," she explained, "it is important the Dares should let this year, and yet I found a great many people who had died at the age of sixty-nine, which is the age of our friend, so I was placed in a difficulty; but sixes and nines are the same, looked at from different ways up, so I made those that had died at sixty-nine die at ninety-six. I hope I did not do wrong."

"It was the same exactly as telling a lie," said Miss Agatha. "If the Dares can sanction that for seven guineas a week, it's their responsibility."

Sir Popham Popham expressed the very greatest interest in Christian Grey's friend and asked me innumerable questions. How long had we known each other? That we had never really known each other until to-day filled him with wondering interest.

Then, as children say, we had tea. Lady Lawrence sat beside me and her gaiety made me silent. By her questions she made my world seem a small and uninteresting one. Her life seemed so full, so varied, so exciting. When she talked of her husband her eyes shone. He was on his way home! She spoke of him in a way that made me feel she disparaged Christopher, which as she did not know him could not have been her intention. But generally speaking she disparaged other husbands than her own.

"Mrs. Jerrold, Margaret, does n't want to hear about Bruce," said Lady Victoria, and I said I did.

I was tremendously interested; for one thing, because his wife looked so beautiful when she talked about him. Cynthia, the second girl, spoke very little but looked very pretty. At this juncture she opened her

lips to say that Margaret seemed to think she was the only woman who had ever been married.

"To Bruce, certainly," Margaret admitted.

In the midst of laughter and joking, the door opened and the butler brought in a telegram, which he handed to Sir Popham.

Margaret asked her father how many that made that day, and he smiled. As he read it, the smile died on his lips. The butler immovable stood waiting. Margaret went on eating. Cyntha over the rim of her cup watched her father. Lady Victoria looked at him and fingered her pearls. No one spoke, and the butler waited.

"Poppy?" said his wife, and he made no answer.

He sat grey and dumb, the telegram in his hand.

"It's nothing," he said. "Mary, I want you!"

He left the room and Mrs. Howard followed him, laying her hand as she passed on Lady Victoria's shoulder.

"What heavenly biscuits," said Margaret; "there is nothing makes one so hungry as amusing poor people. How self-sacrificing we are!"

I saw Cynthia look at her mother, who was balancing a bit of cake on the nose of a dog.

I looked at Christian. She rose and said we must go.

"Oh, no," said Lady Victoria.

"No, no, no," said Margaret.

But we went. Silently we walked away through an open window, out on to the lawn.

"I am afraid there is bad news," said Christian as we walked away.

"What could there be?" I thought; "everyone

seemed so happy. And on such a summer day; nothing could be cruel enough to bring unhappiness to such a place as this."

"We will wait here," said Christian, as we gained the edge of the wood. Just inside the wood we sat down.

A few minutes later across the lawn came Miss Agatha and Miss Dorinda; the one was stern, the other pale.

"What is it?" asked Christian.

"We don't know," said Miss Agatha; "beasts, very likely." Miss Dorinda shook her head. "Come, Dorinda, don't dawdle, or you'll catch cold after the excitement."

As Miss Dorinda passed us, she said softly, "Pray for them; I saw his face when he lost his prize bull. He was angry then, not like this."

Still we waited. The next thing that happened was that over the lawn came running the figure of a young girl, Cynthia! She was making for the wood — to tell us, no doubt. But how did she know we were there? She passed quite close without seeing us. A few paces from us she flung herself down into the bracken, and we heard the tearing of sobs.

"Come!" said Christian.

This was a grief too sacred to witness.

When we got to the village we found everyone astir. Mrs. Barley, the postmistress, stood at the door of her shop, tears streaming down her face.

"What is it, Mrs. Barley?" said Christian.

Mrs. Barley flung her apron over her head.

Christian gently pulled it down. "Tell me," she said.

"It's Miss Margaret — her ladyship's husband — the ship's gone down."

"Are all lives lost?" asked Christian.

"The women and children are saved."

Christian and I walked on in silence. I had come a stranger to Popham; I was now one with them all in their grief. Their sorrow was mine.

"What was he like?" I asked.

"Bruce?" said Christian. "Everyone adored him."

I went back to London, and as I drove from the station, at every corner, I saw newspaper placards. I put my hands to my eyes to shut them out; but I saw Margaret laughing, beautiful, happy and gay, flaunting her happiness in our faces. I saw the sunshine of Popham, its happiness. I dreamed of its misery!

The next evening I heard from Christian. "Margaret is wonderful." she wrote. "I can't understand it. No one dares suggest he may be saved. 'He was a soldier,' she says; 'I'm the wife of a soldier; I would not for worlds have had him leave the ship.' She looks more beautiful in the tragedy and pride of her grief than I have ever seen her."

XXII

OUR return to Dell was a thing we had looked forward to ever since we had left it. I had never really pictured our homecoming because there was no speculation about it. I knew, directly I saw the house, I should wonder how I could ever have left it. I knew I should run, from room to room, to see that my particular treasures were as I had left them. There were even flowers in the garden whose growth I had pictured and I should go at once to see if they were smaller or taller than I had imagined them. On our journey down, even Christopher must have been satisfied with the radiance of my smile. He did not grumble when we stopped at every wayside station; because each one brought us nearer to our own. There seemed no sadness or discontent anywhere. A blue haze shimmered in the open fields, and under the trees there was a deep, cool, inviting shade, accepted with much pleasure by cows and horses. When we arrived at our own station I was seized with a feeling of shyness, unaccountable unless it was that I hardly liked the station people, master and porters, to see how happy I was. There was a want of self-control in my smile; a lack of that self-restraint which Aunt Jolly says should be the social armour of every gentlewoman. As eagerly as a schoolboy Christopher jumped out of the train. And in a moment, like the schoolboy he once was, and is still, he was talking to Blow, who beamed his welcome. As I got into the carriage I expressed my pleasure that it

should be a carriage and not a motor, and Blow said, "It won't be that while I'm alive, ma'am!" and Christopher laughed. Blow asked after our health as though he feared it might have suffered in London and we certainly had seen no one in London nearly so healthy as Blow looked.

"Is n't it lovely, Christopher?" I said, and under the rug my hand stole into his.

"Why did we ever leave it?" he asked. And it was not for me to say.

As we got near the outskirts of the village I withdrew my hand from Christopher's, in case I should need it for waving purposes.

"Now, don't be too affectionate, Priscilla," he said. "Remember no one else thinks anything of our homecoming! A few weeks is nothing to them. They probably have n't realised you have been away. Try and be a little reserved. Not that there will be any occasion for demonstration."

I said, of course not; but I looked, in case, at some window, there should be some dear old woman waiting. There was nobody about. Christopher was right. I almost hoped there would n't be anyone at a window; it would be too touching! Suddenly I felt a change come over Christopher; I heard him say something! I looked at him and found his face frozen, and a dangerous light aflame in his eyes.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Look!" he said. "This confounded Cordelia — sympathising business!"

I looked and around the gates of Dell I saw much people assembled. In their midst I saw someone act-

ing as commander-in-chief. At the wave of an arm, the people divided and old Garlic, in his Sunday best, was pushed from their midst, and in a quavering voice began to read an address of welcome. It contained allusions to the dangers we had encountered in the modern Babylon of London. It dwelt on our influence for good in the village; Christopher's example, my sympathy! It contained everything of a nature to torment, to his uttermost endurance, poor Christopher. I whispered to him to smile. I said how delightful it was of the dear old people to think of it. At that moment the same arm that had waved old Garlic on, now waved him to stop, and intimated, at the same time, that we had permission to pass through our own gates. But before we passed through those we had to pass through an ordeal even more trying than anything we had yet experienced. Before we realised what they were doing, the men had the horses out of the carriage and we were being slowly pulled home by men, who were, many of them, too old and too feeble to make any physical exertion. Christopher saw them disabled for the rest of their lives and pensioned by him.

He said he was tired of this sympathising business. What we wanted was a little envy, hatred, and malice — and the grit to give vent to it — to act as a tonic to our over-sentimentality. He said the whole thing was too idiotic. After six weeks in London! It was making fools of us. It made him hot all over. If we had been to the North Pole, that would be different. Even that made him hot to think of. I thought so easy a way of getting warm might be worth the consideration of an arctic explorer. The idea is his for the taking. But I

did not say so to Christopher, because he was really cross. More from shyness and from the fact of being an Englishman than anything else. That I understood, and I understood also the feeling of devotion that had inspired such a demonstration of affection on the part of the dear people.

Christopher said it was a homecoming he should never forget. I am glad to say that for a few minutes after dinner he did forget it. We sat in the garden and listened to the hush of the sleeping world. We were very glad to be home again. The peace and quiet were wonderful! In London I had not been a social success; but the flowers in the garden did not know that and if Christopher guessed it he did not say so, and by the look in his eyes I should say he did not care. As we sat in the darkness he told me Danby was going to Africa to shoot elephants. I thought I detected a note of envy in his voice, but no surprise. I wondered why Danby was going. Why, when a man is unhappy in love, should he fly for consolation to elephants? Why must a man shoot when he can't love? Does he only love when he can't shoot? I pondered these questions in my own mind, but I did not ask Christopher. Why should men want to kill things when it is such a beautiful world to be alive in?

"We must be kind to Daphne when he is away," said Christopher.

I nodded.

"Don't you think so?" he asked.

"Yes, of course," I nodded.

"I can't see you!" Then after a moment's pause he said, "Priscilla!"

"Yes?"

"There is embrocation in the house, I suppose?"

"I expect so," I said, wondering what he meant.

"Some of those old idiots must have strained themselves."

"Darling old things — not idiots, Christopher!"

"Well, darling old idiots — will that do?"

XXIII

AT her own suggestion Daphne came to spend a week-end at Dell. It was the week after Lord Danby had gone away.

I dreaded the first few minutes alone with her. Christopher thought of a way out. "Ask some of the neighbours to tea!" he suggested.

I asked Mrs. Lane, who is always delighted to meet Daphne. She is enthusiastic in her admiration for her, but admits that she finds her difficult to get on with; which she says she is quite certain is not Lady Danby's fault.

I asked Cordelia Trant because she always amuses Daphne.

I asked one or two others, which, if it was a little unkind to Daphne, was very kind to them.

"Considering, dear," said Mrs. Lane one day to me, "that you are what you are, you are curiously accessible."

That exactly describes me. There is no excitement to anyone in meeting me. They may do it at any moment in the village post-office. Daphne Danby neither buys nor does she lick her own postage-stamps.

On the day on which I was expecting Daphne to arrive from London, Mrs. Lane was the first to arrive to tea. Cordelia followed a few minutes later. I suspected she had waited round the corner until Ashbee had had time to announce Mrs. Lane, and get back with dignity to the door. It is just the kind of consideration Cor-

delia shows. When we were all gathered round the tea-table I asked everyone to listen, I had something to say.

I suppose everyone hoped for something different. They listened with the gravest attention. They would have listened indefinitely; but I said I only wanted to say one word and that was, would they be very careful not to say anything approaching the subject of wild animals to Lady Danby, because Lord Danby had just started on a shooting expedition.

Mrs. Lane said she went weeks sometimes without mentioning a wild animal.

"Or a black man," I ventured.

"Or a black man still less. I can't remember when I last even thought of one. I should think I went months without thinking of one," said Mrs. Lane.

I said I did n't mean that I thought Mrs. Lane would mention anything of the sort, it was only as a protection, against —

"Dear, thoughtful thing!" whispered Cordelia.

At this moment Ashbee threw open the door and announced, "Lady Danby." A hush fell upon the assembly. Daphne looked very beautiful. There was something positively haunting in the sadness of her eyes. Mrs. Lane sat silent and flushed. Cordelia was flushed and sympathetic. She put on her gloves. I knew Cordelia well enough to guess her intention; it was to hide from Daphne that which might recall weddings or husbands or anything that may be suggested by the sight of a ring.

"My dear Priscilla," said Daphne, when she had acknowledged, with a pretty look of surprise, my visitors, "I 'm as hungry as a hunter!"

Here Mrs. Lane threw herself into the breach. She talked hysterically of the organist and the mothers' meeting, subjects which should have no connection, and, as a matter of fact, have none in Dell.

Daphne Danby looked at her bewildered. Once or twice she opened her lips to speak, but was absolutely talked down by Mrs. Lane — a thing to which Daphne is quite unaccustomed.

At last Mrs. Lane stopped and looked at me as much as to say, "There, that's over!"

"I felt like a caged lion," said Daphne, "driving down in the limousine —"

Mrs. Lane was off again; a hunter and a lion in two sentences was more than any one woman could cope with. With raised eyebrows and voice she invited Cordelia to help her, and Cordelia, losing her head, said if Lady Danby felt like a lion anyone else would certainly have felt like an elephant — which, of course, was the last thing poor Cordelia would have mentioned, except as a touching tribute to the slenderness of Lady Danby.

"I had no trunk," said Lady Danby. "In that way I did not resemble an elephant."

I don't suppose the names of wild animals had ever been mentioned in our drawing-room so often as they were that afternoon.

Anyone described as big was invariably as big as a hippopotamus; every graceful girl could only be compared to a gazelle.

Every time anyone mentioned anything approaching an animal of any kind, Mrs. Lane sprang into the breach and carried us breathlessly through a tangled wilderness of wildest assertion.

At last the afternoon was over. The shadows had crept over the lawn and were almost touching the toes of Mrs. Lane's low-heeled shoes before she realised it was so late. She rose to go, and drawing me aside apologised for having inadvertently trodden so often on forbidden ground. She said it was pure nervousness. "Pure nervousness!" she said, wringing my hand and metaphorically both hers.

Cordelia was too distressed to say anything, but she held my hand firmly and pressed it every now and then as we stood watching the departure of Mrs. Lane.

"She did very well, considering," said Cordelia softly, "her range of subjects!"

"Yes," I said, "but I did n't realise how easy it is — "

"To talk of wild beasts?" said Cordelia. "My dear father had two skins in his study, until the moth got into them. I did n't say so, though I might have done so from nervousness."

That evening Daphne asked me, as I expected she would, what had been the matter with those most extraordinary women.

I thought it best to tell her that, entirely out of consideration for her, they had tried not to talk of things that might remind her of Lord Danby's expedition, and they were distressed at having most signally failed.

"My dearest Priscilla," she said, "why? Why in the world should n't I think of it? How unfeeling it would be of me not to think of my poor seasick Danby? I want also to talk about him."

We were in Daphne's bedroom. She asked me to sit down. I sat down beside her on the sofa.

"I came here for a purpose, as you may guess, my most quaint little Priscilla. You are so anxious to understand others, I wonder if you ever try to understand yourself?"

Then, without any warning, she asked me if I had ever felt an overwhelming desire — an overpowering desire to run away.

"From Christopher?" I asked, my flesh creeping at the thought.

"Well, yes, if you choose to put it that way, although I don't believe a woman does run away — as a rule — from her husband; but from the deadly conditions of things in general, from doing the same things at the same time, of every day. It is the monotony I suppose that drives them to desperation."

It struck me Daphne's life was as varied as it was possible for a life to be. But I did not say so. I recognised the necessity for silent sympathy on my part. If Daphne wished to confess, I must let her do it in the way she found easiest.

She went on to say she had plumbed the depths of love and affection. "I have loved Danby desperately. I have trembled at the sound of his footstep."

Here a feeling akin to jealousy seized me. Had I ever trembled at the sound of Christopher's footstep? Remembering I must certainly have done so, I nodded.

"I have longed," she went on, "to save him from the onslaught of a wild bull; but a bull for rescuing purposes was never at hand. I longed, at times when I was very young, to die for him. But death does n't come — mercifully — at the bidding of a heart over-

flowing with love and gratitude. Have you ever felt almost too happy to live?" she asked.

"Very often!" I answered.

"Well, so have I — very often. I have drowned myself in my babies' eyes! I have felt the pressure of their tiny heads here!" she put her hand to her pearl necklace. "It's a wonderful feeling, Priscilla; but will you understand what I mean when I say it is a feeling that is expected of me? It is a great thing to love such a baby as mine, and as yours will one day be. But it is expected of us! Everything is arranged and in order. When Baby was born — the third girl — the papers said Lady Danby was very disappointed! The old ladies who read the paper said now that the baby had come, Lady Danby would n't think of the disappointment. Of course they were right, dear, clever, feminine things! But why was I not allowed to keep things so sacred hidden in my heart? Why should they be blazoned out to the world? Do you see what I mean? For such a baby as mine everything is arranged, even the depth of its mother's love. Nurses are waiting to adore it, canons to christen it. You and I love to order. Do you understand?"

I shook my head; I did n't understand in the least.

"What a shame to tease you! Why did I want to come here? In order to ask if you had ever felt inclined to run away? That was it!" she laughed. "Should you sympathise with a woman who took such a step? Or should you sympathise with the husband of such a woman? I believe you would sympathise with anyone in the world whatever he or she did. It is dangerous, Priscilla, but, in your case, becoming. I can

see your eyes getting bigger and bigger; your expression more pained, more understanding. You would understand me, if I did such a thing, better than I should understand myself. You would bestow throbbing sympathy upon me just as you would if I missed my train or my luncheon! Why, if you have never felt all this should you understand so well the feelings of others? Are you sure you have never felt a desire to run away?"

I shook my head. "Never — never!" I said.

"Neither have I, Priscilla! That surprises you? No, never! Never for one moment have I thought of running away from Danby, and I never thought I should be blamed for not doing so; but I have been horribly blamed and that is why I have come down, to have it out with you, and to make what reparation I can to you, for not having run away from a very excellent husband, of whom I am really very fond."

"Daphne," I exclaimed, "what do you mean?"

She asked me to have patience. "Listen!" she said. "The day Danby left I was crying my eyes out, as, of course, you, with all your understanding, would not have expected me to do, when I was told a lady wished to see me. I was vexed because Ford should have known I was not in a fit state to see anyone. I asked what she was like. And he said she was an old lady and he was sure I would wish to see her. Now, Ford, being a man of the very greatest discrimination, and better at knowing a real lady than any servant I have ever known, I said I would see her. I dried my eyes and by that time Ford announced your Aunt Jolly! Her lace shawl smelt of potpourri — dear thing!"

Daphne paused. She lifted her beautiful arms above her head and smiled. There was something in the memory of that visit that amused her. There was more than lay in the memory of the lace shawl — sweet as that was.

"She was a darling, Priscilla; but she blamed me — she made no bones about it! she blamed me for not having run away; for having, by not running away, placed you in a very awkward position."

"Don't!" I said. "How could Aunt Jolly!"

"Because, my dear little Priscilla, according to Aunt Jolly, you had placed yourself in a very awkward position out of which, she says, it is my duty to extricate you! Now to get you out of that position I must understand what it is. According to her you went to sympathise with Danby because I had run away from him. Now for one little word of advice, never attempt to offer a man sympathy at such a time. Well, as I had *not* run away, it appears, according to Aunt Jolly, that you can't explain your position to Danby. Is that the position?"

I nodded.

"Now, to begin with, what did Danby do in that very difficult position? Did he make love to you. It's no good beating about the bush — we must face facts."

I said, "No, no! I should n't have minded that! I mean —!"

"Don't get flustered, Priscilla; try and be calm. You mean?"

"I mean," I said, "that he told me to remember I had the best husband in the world. Me, of all people!"

"It was quaint, very," said Daphne softly, and she nodded her beautiful head and a softness broke over her face. "And Danby really behaved as well as that? Dear thing, he always was — and he likes you."

I said that was perhaps why. Daphne asked if I thought a man's love took that form of self-abnegation?

"A good man's love must," I said.

"You think he loves you, then?" she said.

"Me, of course not!" I said with horror. "He thought I loved him."

"And you don't, of course! Say you like my Danby a little! D' you know, if I knew he thought I loved him, I should have to!"

"But you do?" I said eagerly.

"Of course I do, if only you and your absurd Aunt Jolly would believe it and would not insist on my running away. Why did you think I had? — tell me."

I told her of the gossip about Mr. Mercer. Then she had been seen driving away with him —

"Someone saw that, did they? They did not give us much credit for cleverness!"

There was a pause; then Daphne said, "I want you to trust me. The secret, such as it is, concerns Billy Mercer. I cannot, at present, tell you what it is; it does not concern me, except indirectly. Danby knows all there is to know. What your Richard knows he learnt by chance. By chance also that evening he and I met in London and he brought me home. The only reason he kept that fact from you was because it was mixed up with a story he thought not pretty enough for you to hear. If anyone has been making mischief out of that,

you know it is mischief and nothing else. Now the only confession I can make, that concerns you and me, is that I envied you a husband so kind and charming as Richard! He even puts up the window of a railway carriage with understanding and sympathy. I enjoyed the journey home with him and that is all I enjoyed of a very miserable evening. Will Aunt Jolly forgive me that?"

"And Lord Danby?" I said.

"What about Danby?" she asked.

"Unless you confess, how can I?"

"My dear child, I cannot confess to doing a thing I never dreamed of doing in order to save you and Cordelia from the consequences of one of the little indiscretions you and she commit by the dozen." Daphne laughed; then she said seriously and very gently, "Forgive me; of course I wrote, at once, to Danby and told him why you had gone to see him. He will get my letter, some day, in Central Africa; perhaps when he comes in from shooting, tired after a long, blank day. And he will be looking forward to dreaming, over the camp-fire, of all the lovely women at home who love him, and he will get my letter telling him that Priscilla, at all events, does not! And he will be very sad. Just the one —"

I begged her not to tease; if she only knew how miserable I had been! I told her it was the only secret Christopher and I had ever had.

She said it need no longer be a secret. "You funny, funny woman," she said. "Good night, Priscilla. Wait!"

She took my two hands in hers. "I want you to re-

member that what one woman can show in her eyes another can just as successfully hide in her heart. Everyone who meets you, even in Sloane Street, knows you are happy and that you have a Christopher at home whom you dearly love and are longing to get back to. Perhaps no one guesses I, too, have someone at home; but he may, for all that, exist. I have not been given the eyes of a child — nor perhaps the heart. Your dear little aunt said she would pray for me. I hope she will. Does she always do what she says?"

"In praying for people? Yes; she keeps a list."

"Don't make me laugh, Priscilla, and don't cry! I am not past praying for!"

"Don't!" I said.

If I understood anyone, it was not Daphne Danby; I told her how I tried to understand and how miserably I failed!

"My child," she said, "don't try! To the man or woman who understands it comes as naturally as the scent to a flower. It is just part of them. And for the divine gift they should go down on their knees every day of their lives."

XXIV

MY dear," wrote Mrs. Lane. "you are back! After your time in London! Are you spoilt? That is what we are all anxious to hear and fear to find. Cordelia Trant and I are both very anxious to hear all your experiences. We could not ask you anything the other day, as Lady Danby was there, and before her you would, no doubt, be shy of relating your social triumphs. What would seem much to us, might to her seem nothing. Nevertheless we shall be very interested in anything you tell us, no matter how small! If all you have to tell is suitable for Dolly to hear, do let me bring her. Say to-morrow afternoon! We will come at any time."

Now there was nothing in my experiences that I could n't tell Dolly, except of course the one with Junella, and it seemed a pity that Mrs. Lane should n't hear that. With her thirst for social knowledge it might be of some service to her as a warning. So I wrote and said that I should be delighted to see them the following afternoon. That there was nothing I could n't perfectly tell Dolly, with the exception of one little thing; but that if she did n't mind waiting for one moment in another room or in the garden, I could get it over in one minute.

So the next afternoon Mrs. Lane arrived, with Cordelia and Dolly. Mrs. Lane whispered to me that it was better not to ask Dolly to wait because the child might think there was more in the story I had

to tell than there really was, but if there were any puppies or anything to see, could n't she go and see them?

I said, Certainly, if there were any. Cordelia said she had never known puppies so accommodating as to appear on the scene just when they were most wanted.

Mrs. Lane turned to Dolly. "Go and ask Ashbee if there are any puppies, dear."

"Puppies?" said Dolly, puzzled.

"Yes, dear, puppies or anything of the kind."

"What for?" very naturally asked Dolly.

"Dear, don't argue," perhaps as naturally answered her mother. "Go!"

Dolly went and I hastened, at the earnest instigation of Mrs. Lane, to tell the story of my encounter with Junella.

"It's all right for Cordelia?" asked Mrs. Lane, when I was in the middle of the story; as a matter of fact, I had just reached Junella's stockings. I said it was perfectly all right, and Mrs. Lane, apologising for having interrupted me, said, "It's not fair to assume that, on account of an uncertain age, anything may be said — that's all."

This was directed at Cordelia, who, with a nod, expressed that it was taken in the spirit it was meant. "That's right, dear," said Mrs. Lane. "Go on!"— this to me.

When I got to the end of the Junella story, Mrs. Lane said, "Is that all? Oh, Dolly must hear it. We can make it all right for Dolly."

She called loudly for Dolly and Dolly answered from

very near at hand. "There are no puppies," she said, excusing her close proximity to danger.

"Did you ask?" said her mother.

"Of course not," said Dolly. "I don't think it's the time of year for puppies." This with a quiet dignity that was very impressive.

"Well, dear, Mrs. Jerrold has such an amusing story to tell you. Or shall I tell it?"

"No, *you*," pleaded Dolly, looking at me.

"I think your mother," I said, not seeing how to bowdlerise Junella.

"Yes, Dolly, I will," said Mrs. Lane.

She proceeded to expurgate my story; so successfully that at the end of a very dull story Dolly knew as little who Junella was as I did when I drove her up and down Bond Street.

Dolly sat looking very serious, and very delicious; but the last child in the world to be put off with puppies.

At the end of the story she said, "That all! I thought you were going to say Mrs. Jerrold had been driving about some very wicked person or a very fascinating actress or a dancer! That would have been really funny!" How in Dell could Dolly's eyes have learnt to dance as they did then?

Mrs. Lane looked at me in despair and raised her eyebrows.

"That is what comes of these weekly illustrated papers — the freedom of the illustrated press I don't altogether approve of."

Cordelia was sorry for Junella. She was quite sure that even in that short time I must have made a difference in her life. Dolly, of course, wanted to know why

Cordelia was sorry for Junella, which question came as a relief to Mrs. Lane.

Mrs. Lane was immensely interested in the egg and butter man. I think she had hopes of him for Dolly. She calculated their respective ages to a nicety, and said, in French, that it would be most suitable. Dolly pointed to a locket she wore, which I knew she had won for French conversation, and laughed. She enjoyed her mother very much.

I asked in my turn news of the village. Everyone was quite well. Nothing of the least importance had happened. The offertories in church had been smaller, of course, by exactly the amount Christopher always gave. I said that should be made up, and Mrs. Lane said she thought she would only have to mention the fact. That it was so like me to understand so quickly. She hated to have to give broad hints, although as a Member's wife she had to do it sometimes.

Cordelia was very interested in my clothes; she wanted to know exactly what I had worn at each of my social triumphs.

When I said I had conspicuously lacked any social triumph, she reminded me of the Count and the artist. I begged her to tell no one of either.

"It shall be our secret?" she said. "And it won't be the first!"

Mrs. Lane here drew me aside and said I had not been seen in the village much since I came home. "Even before you went away I noticed it."

"It's rather hot," I said lamely.

"Hotter than it was last year, my dear, and the year before? Come, it is not that; are you fretting?

Your charming husband seems a little worried about you."

"Christopher?" I said. "Worried?"

"Well, my dear, you have been married over three years."

I nodded.

"Yes," said Mrs. Lane. "Tell me about the Danbys. Are they very happy, do you think?"

I said I was sure they were.

"Ah, well," sighed Mrs. Lane, "their way of showing it is not mine, that's all. Cordelia's not happy about them."

I asked what it had to do with Cordelia.

"Well, nothing, my dear, except that she's his tenant and naturally looks to him, her landlord, for an example."

I said surely that was a new burden on the landlord.

Mrs. Lane said it was the duty of us all to set a good example, whether we had property or not. The truth of which excellent precept I could not dispute.

It was not much Mrs. Lane said; but it was enough to worry me. That she knew something of the Danby affair I felt sure. That there was no Danby affair added to the difficulty. That she was distressed I could see; that she suspected Daphne of showing an interest in Christopher was evident in her tenderness to me. Daphne says Mrs. Lane is too good a woman herself not to suspect others, too tender-hearted a woman not to seek to condone where it was possible.

I was sorry to hear Cordelia was distressed, because Cordelia distressed meant Cordelia on the lookout, and where Cordelia looked she generally found.

But that she had other things to occupy her mind I discovered when a few days later I received from her this letter.

Dear Mrs. Jerrold, —

I've been thinking: Why not make a more general use of the social knowledge you gained in London? Without giving names, or dates, or places, tell the villagers what you have seen and done — the German Count, for instance! How interesting to show them how amicable were your relations in spite of what the papers will go on saying. You could leave out the bit about the "booze" that the people might misunderstand.

I have a photograph of a brother of mine who affects the turned-up mustache. In a snap-shot he is, as a matter of fact, proposing to a girl, at a garden-party, and she is refusing him. No one need know that; a wretch of a schoolboy took the snap-shot. The point is that the girl is looking down; his mustache turns up, so that he could be the Count and you the girl. We could easily have that in the magic lantern. What is the German for "*entente cordiale?*" We could call the slide that! It would bring the German question home to the people, if they could see you whom they so highly respect talking to one. They think so much of you! Do think about it! Dolly Lane could play the incidental music, and perhaps someone could sing a German folk-song! We could easily get other scenes of London, and if you feel you could n't bring yourself to say they are actually photographs of yourself you can say you *know* the places. Do think about it! I don't suppose you know what an interest to the people your

visit to London has been. Poor old Garlic said he was glad to see you back, although he read the address so badly. So touching! He meant, of course, that he did n't expect you ever *would* come back. Was n't the dear people's welcome touching? Does n't it show they have hearts? I always say they have!

So do think about the entertainment! One row of two shillings seats; two of one — and the rest sixpence; standing, one penny, and window-sills, if necessary, twopence. Or ought standing to be more than the sills? They *are* very narrow and *stone!* But that we can decide later! Do think of it!

Yours hopefully,

CORDELIA.

I thought of it for the whole day and most of the night. It was quite possible that Cordelia in her enthusiasm would announce the lecture, reserving only the details, pending my decision.

Christopher came to my rescue by announcing quite casually that he had taken a place in Scotland.

What would have come as a shock under other circumstances came now as a deliverance.

"Soon, Christopher?" I said eagerly.

"Quite soon; are you glad?"

I said I was delighted. That it was a most lovely surprise!

He said he was so glad; he had been afraid I might not like leaving Dell just as I had come back. I did not say that Dell, owing to Cordelia, was the last place in which I wished to be.

"Tell me about it!" I said.

Then Christopher told me that Presley had taken a place in Scotland, and wanted to sublet it.

"Colonel Presley?" I said.

"Yes, the man who came to luncheon; you remember!"

"Yes, I remember, Colonel Presley."

"Why bother with his name? He's taken a moor and it so happens that he is too busy to get away — some important cases have cropped up."

"Do colonels have cases?" I asked.

"Of course," said Christopher, blundering. "War Office business — some muddle or other."

I asked where the moor was?

Christopher looked relieved and changed his position to an easier one. He lay back in his chair and crossed his legs.

"You're getting as practical, Priscilla, as you are prudent."

I said I was really interested. So was he, deeply.

From behind his back he produced a one-inch map. With that before him he spent a delightful half-hour, following with an expressive finger the boundary; showing me the exact position of the snipe bog; the loch where the wild duck — "No, here to be exact," he said. I nodded. I must have him exact. Then the caves from which the pigeons would fly? "Here!" he showed me just where.

"Not here?" I asked, indicating, with a finger, indentations in the coast-line.

"No just there."

He was very serious. So was I. Cordelia was to be frustrated. There would be no lecture in the village

room until the pigeons had flown and the rabbits bolted.

"And the salmon, Christopher?" I asked.

The finger made wide, meandering excursions.

"And trout?" I said.

"Of course." The finger covered a blue loch.

Christopher and Colonel Presley between them had planned a pretty holiday for Christopher, and all on my account. I asked Christopher if he knew the story of the man who had given his wife a brace of retrievers for a birthday present? And he said every married man knew the story. "But does it apply now?" he asked, a little anxiously.

He ran a finger provocatively along miles of hard golden sands and stopped at sand dunes. "Think of mornings spent in sunny sand dunes! And when you are tired of that, behind them lies the golf-course!" he said.

"It is delightful," I said; and it really was. More delightful still was it of people to be ill — I meant of the War Office to get into difficulties, out of which — without the assistance of Colonel Presley — they could not clamber!

"You will like it?" said Christopher wistfully. And I promised.

Then came the question of the guests we should ask. We realised we were late for that. Good shots, we knew, were secured long before August. "I shall be reduced to the duffers people won't ask," said Christopher sadly.

"But," I said, "how kind! What a treat for them, and they *might* improve with practice!"

"I don't take a moor in order to bestow charity on others," he said.

"Then, what do you take it for? or me for, for that matter?" I asked.

Christopher was cornered; I was triumphant, and we laughed.

"Who shall we ask?" he said.

"Cordelia?" I suggested tentatively.

"Try again," he said.

I tried again with little success. Christopher said he would n't have too many women, though what difference women need make to him I did n't know. However, at the end of half an hour we had written out a list of guests and remained friends, which said much for Christopher and more for me. Our list carefully excluded Cordelia. I saw the force of it. We saw so much of her at Dell. It was necessary Christopher should have a change.

XXV

A FEW days before we left for Scotland I asked the Danby babies to tea. The air was full of the feeling of birthdays. In the gentle breeze, in the sunshine, in the scent of the flowers, there was an exhilaration that I always associate with the happiness of birthdays. So I determined my dream Betty should have one, and in its honour, a party. Dancing, Betty adores. Perhaps for the same reason that Baby Bo Danby loves it, which is that at parties she has parsnips. It is her name for partners. And no doubt they can be as charming by that name as any other. Betty has many birthdays in the year. They depend on my mood. If, on a lovely winter day, I see snow lying, and playing in it rosy-faced children, Betty at once takes delicious dimpled form and she calls to those children to come in and play with her, and the day straightway becomes hers.

Priscilla and Richard have very few birthdays because of the uncertainty, in my mind, as to their ages. But they are darlings and love Betty to have as many as I like.

This was a summer birthday. I felt Betty clamouring for it when I got up in the morning and looked out to a wonderful world of flowers and sunshine. She guided my hand while I wrote my invitations to the Danby children. The birthday letters ran as follows.

To the eldest Danby baby: —

Darling Bunny, —
Will you come to tea to-day?
Your loving
PERTENCE COUSIN.

To Pickles: —

Darling Pickles, —
Will you come to tea to-day with your loving
SILLY.

To Bo: —

Darling Peep Bo, —
Will you come to tea with me to-day?
Your loving,
MISSIJELL.

When I went down to breakfast I handed the letters to Ashbee with the injunction to see they went at once and an answer waited for. "At once, ma'am," said Ashbee, paying no attention to Betty, who was jumping for joy under his very nose. How blind are they who never dream!

The babies answered my notes, each after her own manner. Bo's was to cover a sheet of note-paper with what she calls kisses. It showed no originality on her part to put crosses for kisses; but their number showed a tendency to an extreme generosity.

Early in the afternoon the motor drove up and out of it jumped, or slid, rather, two babies. Out of it a third was lifted. The third resented that horribly, and

she shook herself free and proceeded to climb up on the step, all by herself, and slowly down again. "Bo can," she said, with emphasis, and she undoubtedly could.

"She hates being lifted," said Pickles wisely. And what woman would n't when with it went her waist?

"Except sometimes," said Bunny.

"So Bo does always," said Bo.

After we had played every imaginable game and eaten as much as we wanted or was good for us, Pickles said, "Have you got a nursery?"

"Listen, darling," said the nurse; "little girls must n't ask questions."

"But *have* you?" said Bunny, in no way deterred, feeling herself to be outside the radius of "little girlhood."

"Have oo?" cooed Baby Bo.

"Yes, of course; would you like to see it?"

Baby Bo clasped her head in ecstasy; then, having given such unreserved expression to her feelings, went and hid her face in her Nannie's white skirt.

"Come, then," I said.

I led the way, the children clinging round me. Up the stairs running in front of me were Richard and Priscilla. A hand tugged at mine. It was Betty's — the persistent Betty of my dreams. Arguing and walking in front of me were the Danby babies and I nearly tumbled over them at every step.

"Is it a long way?" asked Pickles.

I said it was n't a very long way.

"Baby, darling," said Nannie, "you are making Mrs. Jerrold tumble up the stairs."

Still pulling at me, urging us to come faster, was

Betty. On the wide landing above us, standing against the light of the big window, stood Priscilla, slim and delicious, her eyes dancing with excitement, just as her father's do; her hair a halo of gold.

"Come on," she called.

"Come on," shouted Richard.

"Don't worry Mrs. Jerrold, darlings," said the nurse; "she's going as fast as she can."

And the Danby babies slowed down and in sedate order we reached the nursery door. I opened it. The room was in darkness. "Wait, darlings," I said, "I will pull up the blinds."

I pulled up the blinds, then I turned, and framed in the doorway, I saw the three Danby babies.

"*Is* it a nursery?" said Bunny, holding the others back.

"Is it?" said Pickles.

"A nurselly?" sighed Baby Bo.

"Go in, darlings," said Nannie.

Expectant, delighted, in the middle of the room, ready to receive their guests, I saw Priscilla, Richard, and Betty.

"It is n't like a nursery; at least not very," said Bunny.

"No dollies!" said Pickles.

"No dollies?" said Bo, turning liquid, reproachful eyes upon me.

"No dollies!" I said.

"Are there Teddie bears?" said Bunny hopefully; "they're next best."

"Sure to be," said Pickles.

"Are there?" said Bunny.

"No," I said.

"Not *even* Teddie bears," said Bunny softly.

"No Teddie bears," said Pickles.

"No Teddie dears," murmured Bo.

This was more than my dream children could stand. If I had no nursery I could have no babies. Priscilla walked sadly away and became one with the soft summer evening light that flooded the room. Richard walked away, and lastly, Betty. No babies could stand ignominy such as this. To have their nursery criticised by other babies! So she, too, rode away on a sunbeam, and as she went she never turned to look back.

I walked to the window.

"Is it a rainbow?" said Bunny, slipping her little hand into mine.

Yes, there was a rainbow. "Let's look!" they said, clambering up on to the window-seat. "Are they real things?" said Pickles.

"What? rainbows?" said Bunny. "Of course; don't you know, darling, they are the clothes of poor little babies that are born with no clothes; and they die and then they turn into angel butterflies. Did n't you say so, Nannie?"

Nannie blushed beneath her little black bonnet and said, "No, not quite, darling."

" Buckerflies," murmured Bo. "Bo saw one yesterday."

"Not an angel butterfly," said Bunny.

"Yes, it was," said Bo, pouting. Who likes their knowledge of natural history questioned?

"Was it a yellow butterfly on a pink rose?" said Bunny, determined to get to the bottom of this.

"Yes," said Bo, with decision.

"Then it *was*," said Bunny reluctantly. "Only you must n't always say things *are*, Bo, because they often are n't. Now, listen, was it a tortoiseshell butterfly on a *red* rose?"

"Yes, it was," said Bo, presenting a vulnerable spot to the enemy.

"Then, it was n't an angel butterfly," said Bunny triumphantly.

"Oh! bovverbation," said Bo.

Seeing the situation was a little strained, I suggested we should play "Here we go round the mulberry bush."

So on that summer evening I played, in the empty nursery, with the Danby babies, until, exhausted, we all sank laughing on to the floor.

"Will you ask us again?" said Bunny.

"Oh, pelease!" said Pickles.

But Baby Bo had no need to ask; she took it for granted that she would come back.

The babies that never came back were Priscilla, Richard, and Betty. Until the earthly babies had made them disatisfied with their nursery they had been happy enough in the nursery that lies in the heart of most women.

"We don't mind it's not being a real nursery," said Bunny magnanimously, as she lifted a flower-like face to be kissed.

"No more we do," said Pickles.

"*Bo* saw the nurselly. Bo played —" At this point Bo was ignominiously lifted into the car.

"Did you say 'Thank you' to Mrs. Jerrold for ask-

ing you, darling?" said Nannie to the struggling Bo, who, stiffening herself at will as babies can, said she was going to be busy. And so she was. She had wrested the speaking-tube from Pickles, who, no doubt, had been praying ever since tea that she might sit next it going home, and was pouring peals of laughter down it into the ear of the solemn chauffeur.

XXVI

WELL, we went up to our moor full of hope and expectation.

The castle stood exactly as it had been described — grim and old and mysterious. That first night we listened to the waves breaking on the walls and I got out of bed to look at the sea and remained looking till the fear of ghosts drove me to my bed. I was grateful to Sir George for his treatment. It exactly met my case, whatever that might be. It was only natural that as I went to sleep, or prepared to go to sleep, I should wonder what was the matter with me. I think most women, the least curious, would have ached to get to the bottom of that mystery.

Lord Danby was miles away. There was a selfish joy in that thought alone.

Among our guests for the twelfth was Tony Austin. Christopher had picked him up on the way North and held himself fortunate in getting him. He owed it to a sudden outbreak of scarlet fever in the house where Tony should have been shooting. Now Tony was an excellent shot, and could, under no other circumstances, have found himself disengaged on the twelfth of August.

The sight of Tony and his gun-cases, and his cartridge magazines, and his valet, on the platform of Inverness Station, with a crumpled telegram in his hand, gave me food for reflection. Supposing he had been a girl! Christopher said anything less like a girl he had

never seen. I let that pass; there were points of resemblance I could have traced, if I had chosen; a sweep of delicate eyebrow wasted on a man; but I had other things to think of. Among them this: that anyone who has visited in Scotland must know the inconvenience caused by dates not fitting. One hostess, with the best intentions in the world, cannot receive one till the twenty-sixth; another cannot possibly keep one after the twenty-third. There remain, therefore, three whole days to put in somewhere. The case of a girl might be a very difficult one, — the case of a very attractive girl, a very, very difficult one, and most girls attract someone. Here, it seemed to me, was a field unexplored! an immense opportunity for doing good. A direct appeal from the destitute to which I could not turn a deaf ear.

I did not say anything to Christopher of my intention, because in the first place he has a habit of shutting his ears, to the cries of anything unconventional; for another reason because I knew that, should a girl prove attractive, no one would welcome her more warmly than he would.

Through the medium, therefore, of a highly respectable and widely read daily newspaper I made the following offer to such girls as might have three days on their hands and no hostess to claim them: —

A home in cultivated family, conforming to Scottish customs (scones at all meals), is offered to any girl who between two visits has two or three days to put in. Highest references asked and given. Apply, J.C., Dunlochie, Inverfarshire, N.B.

Could anything be simpler or more concise?

Two or three days must elapse before I could hear. I possessed my soul in patient impatience. I knew Christopher never read the advertisements; so apprehended no danger in that direction.

On the morning of the third day I received a telegram. It was somewhat ambiguously worded: —

Thankful to accept hospitality as offered no time to write reference squire highest integrity married arrive to-day. VIRGINIA STRANGE.

All that was simple and straightforward about the telegram was the signature and the date of arrival. However, I could read between the lines. Virginia was an American, the most delightful and charming kind of American. Christopher would be delighted. He admires American women for their peculiar charm as well as their beauty. He puts down most of their charm to their lack of self-consciousness and none to the fact that one of the most beautiful had once called him "a lovely man." These things at the lips of a beautiful and absolutely sincere woman are not lightly forgotten. I pictured Virginia very beautiful with an immense amount of luggage. That I prepared for. A large farm-cart was sent down to the station, and the house-maids were warned that one of the smaller rooms must be set apart for the luggage.

I knew I should understand Virginia — one who so quickly responded to the hand held out! An Englishwoman would have taken a long time in discovering who we were. Then it struck me that, of course, Vir-

ginia would not know our name. But as we knew hers it did n't matter. The chauffeur had only to say to every beautiful young lady he saw, "Are you Miss Strange?" and he must find her. Lovely girls are as rare on the platform of a railway station as they are elsewhere, and show more.

I had some difficulty in making room for Virginia. Very diplomatically I had to get her into the bedroom that was being religiously reserved for an aunt of Christopher's, who was due in a few days. If the worst came to the worst and the aunt arrived before Virginia left, Virginia must be moved; but I felt sure she would love that particular view of the sea. The difficulty, I foresaw, would be to get her to go to bed at all.

The immediate difficulty was to get everyone out of the house so as to be alone when Virginia arrived. I wanted no questions asked beforehand. When everyone saw how lovely she was they would be so delighted to have her that they would n't question the manner of her coming. I wondered where she was going, and from where she was coming. I awaited her with the greatest impatience. I was really going to be of some help to someone! I stood at a bedroom window which commanded the best view of the drive. I should be able to see her at a distance and from her very shape discover her probable age and style of beauty.

In course of time, sweeping swiftly round the corner of the drive, came the car. The first thing I saw was that Miller was enveloped in a blue veil. It was a portion of Virginia's veil that fluttered across his face. The next thing that struck me was the danger of it. Miller was talking; that surprised me. But Virginia

would, of course, be asking him the age of the castle. He probably was asking her to kindly remove her veil. The age of the castle he did n't know. No one does!

As the motor slowed down I ran quickly downstairs and in the space of a minute or so my hand lay limply in the grasp of Cordelia Trant's.

"You — you — you!" she said, "how delightful; you dear, unexpected person!"

"It is you who are unexpected," I gasped.

"It's a little awkward, I must own, if we allow ourselves to feel so, but you cannot imagine how delighted I was to see Miller. You see you never gave me your address. I was —"

"But your telegram — your reference — your name — ?"

Then it came upon me that, of course, Virginia was still at the station, waiting. She was encountering the very dangers I had tried to save her from. It was horrible to think how many people might have stared at her by now, were staring at her!

"But there's Miss Strange," I said.

Cordelia Trant pointed to her own tweed coat.

"But the name?" I said.

"Not stranger the name, dear Mrs. Jerrold, than your initials. The reference, I own, was really funny because I was going to venture to give dear Mr. Jerrold; I knew he would n't mind! Now tell me what you are doing!"

I told her of my intentions and she said she thought they were most excellent. I should most certainly, at once, write out another advertisement; she had seen two very pretty girls at Inverness Station, who looked

as if they had n't the least idea where they were going. They were asking porters all the time which way they were to go, as if the porter could tell!

I thought I had advertised enough for the moment. I asked Cordelia why she was masquerading as Virginia Strange.

"Don't call it that, it sounds too much! It is really quite simple. I suddenly thought I should like to write a book — why not? Someone asked me if I ever had and I said, No! it had never occurred to me to do so. Well, at that moment it did occur, and I thought a seasonable thing would be a novel about Scotland and here I am! 'Conforming to Scottish customs' did it. Did n't the advertisement say so?"

"Are you going to write a book about us?" I asked.

Cordelia said of course not. "I shall completely alter your names. I may give Mr. Jerrold a beard and a slight limp, probably owing to a fall when he was a baby and the nurse never telling. I shall give you hair the colour of grapes, whatever that may be, and green eyes. No one could possibly recognise you. Now what about scones at every meal?"

Cordelia cocked her head on one side and it flashed upon me that she was hungry. I asked her if she would like to wash before tea and she said she thought she would.

I took her to her room, the room prepared for Virginia. In the middle of the room, like a penny bun in a desert, lay Cordelia's little box!

"My dear Mrs. Jerrold," said Cordelia, as she made a very excellent tea, "finding copy is the difficulty! I am certainly going to write a book, but about what?

that is the question! How do people get copy? I made an effort which ended disastrously. I wrote a very excellently worded letter to my brother saying I thought it my duty to tell him I had been married for years and that the time had come when I must think seriously of my son's future — he being now of an age to determine on a profession! I hoped," said Cordelia thoughtfully, "in the name of copy I might be forgiven!"

"But," I said, " your brother knew nothing about copy?"

"No, naturally; if he had it would n't have answered the purpose. You see, I proposed that my heroine, who had been thought a spinster, should suddenly in the fifth chapter — I think excitements should come early in the book, or people won't go on — where was I? Yes, in the fifth chapter my heroine should turn out to be a married woman, really married, with a son, heir to a large property, claimed by another. I wanted to discover how her statement would be received by relations — usually kind — when she made it. I am not like the Frenchwoman. I do not find my imagination a substitute for experience."

I asked what her brother had said.

"That was the disappointing thing. His letter was of such a nature as to make its inclusion within the pages of a novel, essentially meant for young men and women, impossible. His only excuse for writing so was that he thought me a married woman. As copy my effort was wasted. The difficulty was that I did not wish my brother to know I was going to write a book."

I asked her what she did.

She said she simply wrote and said that in a mo-

ment of mental aberration she had written the letter and asked him to forget it, as quickly as she was going to forget it.

"And?" I asked.

"He wrote and said he hoped it would n't happen again. Now, in your case, so far as copy goes, I gained very little, knowing you both so well. If ever I do describe you, in any book, I think I should keep you within the precincts of your own very charming home at Dell. I think everyone, so far as is possible, should be kept in their own place, with their own background. But this is really delightful," she said, walking to the window. "I feel certain I could write here! If you could play soft music to me, the soft pedal down, I mean, I could make a child die! It's wonderful what a difference music makes!"

I said I was very sorry I could n't possibly countenance the death of a child in a book — it should be prohibited by law!

Cordelia was disappointed, but she said good-humouredly that perhaps I was right; perhaps it was too easy a way of harrowing. There remained, then, the copy difficulty!

She returned to the scones. "Tea in the dining-room, one of the Scottish customs? I like it. I always make a point of speaking to anyone at an hotel if I think she looks nice."

I wondered if it would be kind to warn Cordelia of dangers which she had possibly forgotten existed and which lay in the path of those who befriended strange females — Junella dangers, for instance.

Fresh in my mind was the memory of Junella and

her appealing cordiality. However, I find it best to let Cordelia go her own way, in things social, so long as she leaves lectures alone; she usually comes out all right, and I should say there are not many Junellas in the hotels Cordelia frequents.

"If," said Cordelia, "there had been any unattached girls in the hotel, I should remember them and I could have wired to the proprietor of the hotel for you and found out their names!"

I had to break to Christopher the news of Cordelia's arrival. It was not that he disliked her; but we had thoroughly discussed the subject of asking her to Scotland and he had had such very excellent reasons for withholding the invitation that he must necessarily be surprised when he found her installed, probably in his armchair, with her feet, not on the mantelpiece certainly, but stuck out in front of her as is her habit.

When the men came in from shooting, I was waiting in the hall to meet them.

"Christopher!" I said.

"Fifty —" he began.

"Yes, I know — at least, I am glad, but I want to tell you, Cordelia has turned up unexpectedly."

Christopher said he was delighted; they had had an excellent day. Tony Austin said, "Cordelia! How delightful that sounds! 'Yours cordially, Cordelia,'— does she so sign herself? Is she young and beautiful?" he whispered. "Are our hearts to be broken? — our peace disturbed?"

"She's charming," I said, "but not beautiful, and not really young."

A shadow that had fallen over the face of Biddy Benson passed away, leaving her smiling serenely.

"And you must n't tease her," I said.

"Heaven forbid," said Tony, as he went to his bath.

Biddy's eyes followed him wistfully. I wished she would n't show her feelings so plainly; it was so bad for Tony.

"Is she nice?" said Biddy, slipping her arm through mine. "He *did* shoot so well."

"Who, Christopher?" I asked.

"You dear, understanding thing," she said, squeezing my arm. Then asked, "Is she pretty?"

"Who?"

"The someone who has just come."

"Cordelia Trant?"

Biddy nodded.

XXVII

A FEW days later I was really thrilled by the receipt of a letter from a girl signing herself "Vanda Summer," asking if I would consider her claim to my hospitality for the space or two or three days, between two visits. She described herself as young and devoted to Scottish customs. Like Cordelia, she left me no time to do anything but send to meet the train. Again Miller went to the station; again a cart was sent for the luggage; again I stood at the window waiting. This time upon my shoulder rested the hand of Cordelia; upon my heart a burden of apprehension. Again round the corner swept the motor. Beside Miller sat a figure as slim and as upright as a hatpin. I went downstairs and in a few seconds I was greeting the loveliest creature, next to Junella, I had ever seen. Where Junella was brilliant and beautiful, and alas! something more than either, — at least *I* don't think she was really, — this girl was lovely and mysterious. She reminded me of "love in the mist." Her eyes were softly blue; her hair soft and golden; in softest shades of blue and grey she was dressed. Everything about her, even to her voice, was soft. She spoke hardly above a whisper. Her thanks, she whispered. Pathetically beautiful was her mouth; her eyes wistfully beautiful. Her manner diffident and appealing. Here was a delightful change for Christopher.

Her luggage was all I had expected Virginia's to be. Vanda followed me upstairs. Cordelia, slipping past

her, whispered to me, "She must have my bedroom."

"D' you mind?" I asked.

She shook her head. "I rather prefer her style to Lady Danby's; of course I don't mind!"

It was not in the heart of Cordelia to keep such a creature as this out of the bedroom with the best view of coast and sea, and above all, of sunsets! A sea by moonlight was wasted on Cordelia. Her profile did n't entitle her to the rhapsodies it awakened or should awaken. Here clearly was a creature who could appreciate it. There was something of the sadness of the sea in her face, of the inevitableness of the sea.

While I gave her tea, Cordelia saw to the changing of the room. She said her things would n't take long to move. They did not.

When she came and whispered to me triumphantly that everything was ready, I asked Vanda if she would like to see her room and she wanly smiled her thanks. I took her to the room. She walked straight to the window and said nothing. Therein lay the difference between her and Junella; not the only difference, of course. Junella possibly would never have ceased saying what she thought of the sea. Vanda said nothing. I left her standing there, slim, silent, and serious. Silhouetted against the window she looked ethereal. So might a captured maiden of long ago have looked, from a cruel prison, for mercy to her grim gaoler, the sea.

A slim hand rested on the casement. In her eyes burned hot tears. That I could see. My heart naturally ached for her and even Cordelia was unstrung!

My mind was wholly occupied in breaking the news

of this fresh adventure to Christopher. That she should turn out to be another Junella I had no fear. That Tony might know her I thought was almost a certainty, and how explain her presence? That she had a secret and a sad one, I was certain. I must tell Tony that if he knew it he must keep it to himself, that a secret was sacred. Unless by knowing it I could really help her. He must judge for himself whether he should tell me or not.

Christopher was horribly concerned when I told him. He was more, he was angry. He said it was an absurd thing to do, most inprudent, advertising for strange females. I laid myself open to the most awful disasters! That there were no girls who had n't at least one uncle or aunt in Scotland! Everyone had some relation who took something in Scotland. That it was altogether ridiculous nonsense!

That is where Christopher was wrong. He argued from an entirely wrong basis. It is the favoured few who have uncles and aunts in Scotland. Given, for the sake of argument, an uncle and an aunt, there was still the difficulty of fitting in dates. The fact of being an uncle or an aunt did not give the uncle or the aunt the power to make eight bedrooms into fifteen. Most shooting-lodges had very few bedrooms. I said I thought we should use the bedrooms given to us for good just as —

Christopher took out a note-book and wrote something down. I asked him what he had written. "To take a lodge next time with very few bedrooms," he said.

It was the first time I had ever seen him really cross

about an unimportant thing. He spoke in disparaging terms of harems. Of course I should have done no less myself; but under the circumstances the smallest reference to them showed a want of nice feeling on his part. I was not to blame; I had quite innocently done my best to meet the possible difficulties of girls peculiarly placed, and I had not imagined them in their dozens. I had pictured a possible one.

The worst was to come. Once again a telegram was brought to me — as before by Ashbee. His face wore a look that betokened the dread of the "eternal feminine." Personally I hoped the telegram might relate to refractory dogs; but no, I read this time, through my tears, "Shall arrive this afternoon don't meet me. Virginia Strange."

Virginia Strange! That alone made it impossible. Two people could not impersonate "Virginia Strange." Vaguely I hoped that this might be a telegram Cordelia had sent that had miscarried (postcards I knew had found their way to Australia in newspapers; telegrams might have a delightful way of their own of evading delivery).

I sought Cordelia. I found her in the throes of novel-making. Pen in hand, with her face seawards, she was jotting down the lights and shades on the water; its changing colours; the number of gulls per minute that sat on the crests of the waves; the rhythm of their rise and fall with the swelling of the ocean. She said there was a vogue for descriptive writing of a very simple kind. She had known the making of an apple-pudding, a poem in prose.

Silently I laid the telegram over the manuscript.

She read it. "Vir—gi—nia Strange! My dear Mrs. Jerrold, here's copy with a vengeance."

"Christopher said it was a harem before," I said, with something like a sob in my voice.

"Never, dear Mrs. Jerrold, he could not have thought that! We would not for the world do you an injury in thought, word, or deed! But this is the real thing!"

She clapped her book to and rose, bowing to the ocean.

"What is the real thing?" I asked timidly.

"No sea for me! This is the real thing! I saw her at the station hotel; trunks upon trunks, all big and striped. Spotted trunks bound with wooden laths — you know, the real thing! I heard she was rolling in money — simply rolling — I took her name because it came to hand, just at the moment when I was hard put to for a name. I never imagined she, too, would answer your advertisement. There is n't a door in Scotland that would n't open its widest to her. She's as fresh, as delightful, as beautiful as American novels lead us to expect of their women. Talk of Dana Gibson profiles, they're blunt compared to hers."

I wondered? Could Virginia's nose be more proudly tilted than those immortalised by Dana Gibson? her lips more exquisitely modelled? her throat more perfectly rounded?

"Mr. Jerrold won't mind this addition to" — Cordelia stopped — "his house-party. I could n't find the word. You can tell him from me that she's just the — what half the young men in Scotland would give up shooting all the grouse for, if she demanded of them that sacrifice. Now, what about the room?"

I shook my head.

Cordelia continued to gain courage every minute. "Let me see — Vanda Summer has had two sunsets and does n't look any the better for it; in fact, worse. They are telling on her, there's no doubt about it. I thought so at breakfast this morning. They do take it out of one. She must give up that bedroom and come to the one next to me. She's just in the right mood for the lighthouse. There's something more personal about it. Then the flashes at night are company, in a sense. Whatever Vanda Summer thinks about it, there's the real Virginia to think of. She must have the best we can give her. It's wonderful what the Americans do for us when we go there; I've heard Lady Danby say that."

Cordelia's enthusiasm was all very well; she had seen Virginia and could afford to be excited and sympathetic; I had Christopher to appease. How should I break to him the arrival of yet another woman?

When he came in that afternoon from shooting, he found me in his dressing-room, sitting in the window, with my back to the light. If I could control my voice I certainly could not command my expression.

Quite gaily, considering, I said, "Christopher!"

He came over to the window and putting his arm round me, he said, "Darling, darling, forgive me, I was a brute; I am so sorry I was so cross about those confounded women — but you understand! It depresses me to see a herd of women wherever I go; and Vanda is n't really pretty — she looks dyspeptic. Tony, too, is going and it really appals me to think that I am to be left one man among so many; when I am quite

happy alone with you, darling! Seton and Hammond come next week."

I said, of course I understood, but could n't he get some men at once?

"My darling, I told you that, taking the place at the last moment, as I did, I can't. They are all engaged. But I took the place for you, of course, so do what you like, but — no more women, darling!"

My heart beat thirty-six in rapid succession, then missed one, then went off again. "Christopher," I said, "what if one other came? — one quite beautiful and fascinating, like no one you had ever seen?" I drew breath. I saw a gleam of light in his eyes — the look I had seen there when we had been discussing Junella; did he imagine, poor darling, that I was breaking to him the arrival of Junella? Did he think I was going to do her good? To open to her the gates of a refined home?

"Even to such a houri," said he, "I must say, No! One more woman and I go!"

He looked round his dressing-room, as though appraising the amount of his luggage, gauging the time Ashbee would take to pack the needful number of boots.

"I'm very much in earnest, Christopher," I said; "there's another answer to my advertisement! It's from a lovely American; the loveliest, freshest, and most fascinating American you ever saw! She would even make the making of an apple-pudding interesting — I mean, she is so original and so delightful."

Christopher began collecting his boots and putting them in rows. Opening his wardrobe and taking stock-

ings and socks out of the drawers and flannel shirts from the shelves.

I imagined he was trying to be funny and succeeding badly enough, when I was feeling so miserable.

Then I remembered that I must never fail Christopher, that here was a chance, and I smiled.

"It's no good smiling at me, darling; you look sweet, but I shall go for a few days with Tony, and I hope when I come back that the home for destitute women will have closed its doors."

"You are going to-day, Christopher?" I said.

He said, just as soon as the new houri arrived. In a way it was nice of Christopher to be able to run away from a beautiful woman; few men would or could. But here was an occasion on which I must show the courage of my opinions. "Then, Chrichard," I said, "I shall never speak to you again."

This came with appalling suddenness. It was the first time I had ever said such a thing to him. That I did not drop down dead surprised me; that he did not do so surprised me more. He did nothing of the kind; he went on sorting ties, of the most cheerful colours. I left him; and as I went down the passage I heard his bell ring. A moment later I came face to face with Ashbee hurrying towards the dressing-room. He gave me a reproachful look, as he said, "Another lady has just arrived, ma'am, in her own car — with two men."

My heart leapt. Here was a reprieve. "Gentlemen, Ashbee?" I said, with a thrill in my voice. Two must keep Christopher at home!

"Two servants, ma'am, one white, one black, and a maid to follow, I understand."

"White or black?" I said, dazed; then added, "I don't mean that; I was thinking of something else. Mr. Jerrold has been called away on business; go to him at once."

Which Ashbee did; I went downstairs.

In the middle of the drawing-room, on a low seat, sat Virginia Strange. The quondam Virginia Strange, from her position on the hearthrug, stood gazing at the real thing with rapt admiration.

Vanda, with parted lips and liquid eyes, sat drinking in the beauty of the latest arrival. On her usually pale cheeks burned two pink spots. As near to the goddess as propriety, on such a short acquaintance permitted, sat Tony Austin. He, too, was looking at Virginia and giving very adequate expression, without speaking, to his feelings regarding her arrival. Away in a corner, pretending rather defiantly to play patience, sat little Biddy Benson. The slenderness of the American beauty seemed to make Biddy look stumpy, an indignity she had never before suffered. The clearness of the American's skin seemed to show up the brownness of Biddy's. The slenderness of Virginia's feet made Biddy hide hers under the table, and in Biddy's eyes burned hot tears because Tony had eyes for no one but Virginia.

"How d' you do?" I said.

Virginia rose and with the most delightful cordiality imaginable bade me welcome to my own drawing-room — to Scotland — in fact, to the world! She told me I was just too lovely for words; that I was exactly what she had pictured me; that the setting was perfect! She said directly she saw the old castle she knew it could n't be the background for anything that was n't

just right; that was n't just too lovely and beautiful. "I'm not including men this trip," she said, giving Tony a look of extreme friendliness, calculated to soften any blow to the consistency of putty. "I came right along," said Virginia, "without waiting for an answer. Your advertisement was so plain, so concise; there was no need for anything more. I think it was just too wonderful of you to think of poor lonely girls without anywhere to go. I never heard of anything like it before. It touched me very much. I did n't expect to meet such a thing, I confess! I wrote several well-known people suggesting myself; but my letters, of course, miscarried. Otherwise I might, at this moment, have been sitting talking to the Duchess of Chilton. She has, I am told, the loveliest and the oldest uninhabitable castle in Scotland; say, it's not much older than this nor lovelier; could it be?"

"No, rather not," said Tony, looking at Virginia.

"It's just more perfectly uncomfortable — well, that can't be helped. The Duchess came to America one fall and my grandfather had the honour to show her around. She would have answered my letter, say, Mrs. Jerrold?"

I said, she would most certainly have answered it. There could be no doubt about it.

Virginia was relieved. "Well, I'm glad," she said, "that the dear old thing did n't. I would n't give this up for all the duchesses in the world." With her wonderful eyes she swept the room, and Tony deliberately placed himself within her vision.

I offered Virginia tea, but she had too much to say to stop for tea. She had so much to see. Tony offered

to take her out. A sunset was due in an hour's time. They took you by surprise — it did n't do to risk a moment's delay. Virginia expressed herself ready and eager to seize every moment. "They make me cry, Lord — Sir — Mr. — ?"

"Mr. Austin," said Tony.

"That all?" said Virginia. "I expected more. Well, I've been told that a real lord has a red beard; is that so?"

Tony said there was as much truth in that as there was in the statement that every butler has a mustache.

Virginia said it was very curious he should say that because just two days ago she had shaken hands with a very nice gentleman with a mustache, and he had just gone on saying all the time, "I'm the butler, I'm the butler."

Virginia said she had been told in some parts of England you never ought to shake hands with a man with a mustache because he was certain to be a butler. "Say, is that so, Mr. Austin?"

Tony said, in some parts of England, undoubtedly, yes. Which was bad of Tony.

At that moment Christopher came into the room. I was glad he was looking his best. He put on an air of great preoccupation, as if he were looking for things to pack. "I'm just off, Priscilla," he said. "You will explain to your guests. Will you be ready in half an hour, Tony?" He took out his watch and snapped it to with great deliberation.

Tony sprang up as if he were shot. "I say, old man," he said, "I was going to ask you if I might stay on a bit. The children where I am going have developed measles, or something of that sort."

"It's funny," said Christopher, "what unhealthy children you know!"

"Christopher," I said, "before you go, may I introduce you to Miss Strange?"

If there was a triumphant note in my voice the beauty of Virginia was the extenuating circumstance. Christopher bowed a little elaborately and Virginia welcomed him as kindly as she had welcomed me. She was so sorry he was going away. She looked it and Christopher visibly softened. Would he have the strength to go? I wondered. I hoped he might stay, and yet, if he did, it would be a slight to Vanda, who was really very pretty, if a little depressing.

But Christopher went, and as the motor drove away, Ashbee turned to me and, with a look cast directly heavenwards, disappeared into the back regions. His look haunted me; not less the fact that Christopher had not turned to wave good-bye. For the first time in my life I knew the meaning of absolute and complete misery. The Danby disaster sank into insignificance! Through that time I had enjoyed the pleasureable sense of martyrdom and the sympathy of Christopher. Although his sympathy had been for something purely of his own imagination, it had been very helpful. But now I was alone with five women, two of them strange, and one man, Tony, who was wholly in love with one woman, partially in love with another, and devotedly adored by a third.

Cordelia, note-book in hand, hovered around like a vulture, waiting to swoop down upon its prey. I found Vanda filling a "Red Dwarf."

XXVIII

AUNT JOLLY, when she sends a Christmas card to a friend, never rubs out the price on the back, but adds a figure in pencil; not thereby meaning to deceive and make the card appear of enormous value, but because she finds it simpler. "I've never been lucky with indiarubber, dear," she says plaintively.

It was evident that I was not lucky with visitors. That they were very charming was not to be denied; but they were also the cause of my first estrangement with Christopher.

The day after he went away three times did Ashbee come and ask me if I had any more letters for post. I had no more. He has done the same thing at Dell on occasions when Christopher has been away and once or twice I have been obliged to say, "I posted my letter to Mr. Jerrold myself, thank you, Ashbee."

The pointed way in which Ashbee asked me if *all* the young ladies would be down to breakfast, or in to lunch, was exasperating. Every morning Mrs. Stubbs, the cook, asked me if *all* the ladies liked grouse, if *all* the ladies liked scones, if *all* the ladies preferred this to that? After all, there were only three that were not expected.

Vanda Summer kept up her character of mystery. Virginia Strange, in her impulsive, warm-hearted way (kindness oozed from her finger-tips), made it her object in life to discover wherein lay the reason of her sadness. She and Tony found it the matter for enor-

mously long discussions. Down on the rocks they sat for hours. They would lead me to believe they spoke only of Vanda, of her sorrow, and of her melancholy beauty.

"She's very, very beautiful, Mrs. Jerrold," Virginia would say, gazing at me seriously with her own beautiful eyes. "But it just haunts me, that look! It breaks my heart; just as it is slowly but surely breaking the heart of this lovely young man here," indicating, with the point of her stick, Tony.

He, with some warmth, set out to clear his character of this over-sensitiveness. If his heart was to break it would be somewhere nearer home — just about on that very rock on which Miss Strange was sitting.

Virginia smiled and shook her head. And by the way she looked over the sea — which we were told was the only thing between us and America — I imagined her heart to lie in that direction; and that she would not be long in finding her way back to it and to him who held it in his tender keeping I was certain. While Virginia gazed seawards, Tony gazed Virginiawards, and I looked and guessed there was something between them. An understanding, perhaps.

Our first dinner was successfully got through. Tony was a host in himself. Virginia could have entertained double our number. We listened while she monologued, as by way of apology she called it. It needed no apology. The simple elegance of her clothes defied even Tony's criticism, whose boast it was that he could tell, at a glance, the date of a sleeve. There was not much to go by in Virginia's sleeve. But the arm it disclosed suggested a date of creation, fairly recent.

It could not have been in the world more than a bare eighteen years, and had kept the soft roundness of childhood. Everything about Virginia was exquisitely youthful except the amount of wisdom that was stored in her little head. Of that there seemed an inexhaustible supply, and she knew more of England than England or any of us knew. Our knowledge of everything paled before hers. Cordelia, who had an uncle a bishop and who thought herself great on cathedrals, found herself a babe in architectural knowledge, compared to Virginia. She had never even heard that a part of Westminster Abbey was built of chalk! She even went so far as to question the accuracy of that! Tony warned her that she had better not be so bold.

Vanda made no attempt to disclose what she did n't know. And Tony made no secret of the fact that he knew nothing except of things social. There he was willing to teach and Virginia to learn. She put him through his paces and what Virginia did n't know at the end of dinner about dances, and entertaining in London generally, was n't worth knowing.

"You have n't been making fun of me now, Mr. Austin?" said Virginia. "When I get home I may say, one in the highest circles told me —"

"No, not that, please," said Tony.

"But why?" said Virginia. "You've told me most intimate things about the royalties. I know more about dukes and their quaint little ways than I ever thought to know — and if it's all true —"

"Well, not my name," pleaded Tony.

"Would America know your name," said Virginia, "if by some awful accident it slipped out?"

Poor Biddy Benson, with burning cheeks and hurt, angry eyes, tried every now and then to snub Virginia. She might as well have tried to snub Cleopatra's Needle; so far above all petty spite and littleness was Virginia. She rose above us all, cool, and calm, beautiful and stately, old in the wisdom of the ages, as young as a newly opened rosebud and as fresh.

"And that lovely Mr. Jerrold," she said, turning to me, "has gone! Don't you miss him?"

Knowing how much I missed him, I said nothing. I smiled.

"Don't you hate the business which takes him away? I do," she said, and Biddy looked daggers at her.

"A real Englishman," Virginia went on, "was just what I wanted to know. A tall, splendid-looking man like that!" she sighed.

Tony drew himself up.

"Long in the legs, I mean," she said, glancing with disparaging eyes at Tony's elongated body.

Tony shrank.

"I hate very long legs," blurted out Biddy Benson.

Vanda said she thought Mr. Austin was just right, which was the nearest attempt at a direct statement of opinion Vanda had ever made. Tony looked nervous. He did n't recognise, as I did, a wish on the part of Vanda to stand up for Biddy in the face of a very formidable enemy. Not that anyone, I think, really looked upon Virginia as an enemy except Biddy, and she, I felt, would live to be won.

We went to bed. I wondered if anyone had as little idea of sleep as I had. I was jealous of them all comfortably sleeping; Vanda with tears, perhaps, on her

cheek, but asleep! Cordelia pillowless, but asleep! Biddy resentful, but asleep! Virginia dewy and rosy, but asleep! Tony dreaming blissfully, and asleep!

Christopher — where? Asleep? No. I could n't believe that of him. I knelt at the window and looked out. There was a brilliant moon; across the sea lay a pathway of molten silver. It was all so lovely, so mysterious — the radiance!

My heart stood still. Below me, on the rocks, silhouetted against the radiant splendour, I saw the figure of a girl; slim, upright, beautiful. The garment she wore — an unearthly garment it looked — gleamed in the moonlight. She was an entrancing vision. Her hair was piled on her head. She held her white arms out to the sea as if to embrace its loveliness, and it lapped her feet as if to embrace hers. Then, as if in obedience to a call, she let fall the gleaming garment and stepped out, a tall, beautiful, boy-like figure, in a silver bathing-dress. A modern ghost, was this.

Silently she slipped into the water and began to swim. I could see the motion of her white arms dividing the water. She stopped! Was she drowning? No, she was kissing her hand to the stars, laughing at the moon! Was she mad, I thought. Then I remembered Vanda. This, perhaps, was the way she had determined to lay down a life that had become unbearable. She had been a guest in my house and I had not discovered that her unhappiness was so great as to lead her to this. Forgetting my natural terror of ghosts, I went downstairs, out of the door that led on to the terrace overlooking the sea, and down on to the rocks. I had not imagined myself so brave. I was just in time

to welcome a cold, dripping, and beautiful Virginia as she clambered on to the rocks, seizing my hand with one of hers. That hers was icy cold was not to be wondered at.

"How could you do it?" I asked. "You will be chilled to death."

"My dear Mrs. Jerrold, you don't think that! Why, nothing Virginia Strange likes kills her. I just loved it — it's too wonderful, and that poor man of yours away! He would have enjoyed it! He's got soul in his face! Say, would he have enjoyed it?"

I was aware that Christopher would probably have enjoyed it very much — and why should n't he? My consolation was that he would have admitted it.

In a few minutes Virginia was in the bath in my bathroom, where the water is always hot, and through the door I was asking her how she was getting on. "It's lovely, Mrs. Jerrold, and that moon! — I could have hugged it."

It took a moment only to put a match to my fire, and not long afterwards Virginia and I were sitting in front of it, drinking the cocoa that Virginia had produced from one of her trunks, boiled on a spirit lamp that she also produced from somewhere.

"Say, Mrs. Jerrold," she said, wrapping a blue kimona round her, "that dear boy Tony — he's really English, is n't he? With all his little prejudices, and theories, and his delicious ways. He's too sweet for words and he takes it all so seriously."

I asked in what way, Tony seeming to me to be rather the opposite to a serious young man.

Virginia, spreading her fingers to the flame, said,

with regard to Vanda Summer, he showed a lack of purpose that you would n't find in an American young man. If an American wanted a girl he got her. So long, of course, as he first made the girl want him. No American man would force a girl against her will to love him; but he would make pretty sure that she did. He would make her want him without robbing her of the delicious feeling of self-surrender that was hers by birthright. I said I was surprised; that I had always understood that it was the American girl who made the men do what she wanted.

"So the men say," mused Virginia; "that's where the men are cleverer than people give them credit for."

"But to return to Tony Austin," I said. "I think he has shown some tenacity of purpose."

"In talking to me, Mrs. Jerrold? Is that what you mean?"

I nodded.

"That," said Virginia, "was just curiosity; he thought I was going to talk differently to other people, to say something startling. He was looking for what he calls American freshness! Well, I don't happen to have it about me! I'm just like any other girl. In what way am I different from an English girl? Then you must remember it's of that lovely Vanda we talk."

"Entirely?" I asked.

"Why, certainly, except for those intervals when I have told him about my beaux — over there," indicating with a wave of her hand the direction in which lay the ocean. Virginia spoke as though her beaux

stood in rows on the other side, as perhaps they did — waiting.

I asked Virginia if she thought Tony was really attracted by Vanda. She said it was more than that, it was an infatuation.

"But he won't let himself go until he knows what her father is. Now that strikes me as strange! So long as a girl's father is good and true and honest and generous and straight, what does it matter in what he makes his pile? If her papa happens not to be honest, true, and good, then that young man owes that girl something. She's missed a great deal in life and he's just got to give it to her. He's got to give her the belief in a good man. A girl can't get along in the world unless she believes in the goodness of at least three men — her papa, her husband, and a possible second husband — just to keep up her spirits! Some can't bear the thought of that; others can. There's my father; he's the dearest thing in the world and the best; how he makes his money I should be proud to tell Mr. Austin; but he would go off in a dead faint; at least, if he cared for me he would. But it does n't interest him how my papa made his money."

Virginia rose and stood before the fire. "Mrs. Jerrold," she said, "there's a remarkable difference in your country and ours. We have young men in America as good-looking as your Tony, as well born, as charming, who go out summer-time, hiring themselves as waiters in order to get money to take them through college. My aunt has an English butler, just as handsome, just as magnificent as Ashbee, and in her village was a young man just as handsome as Tony, and he had

no money, so he decided to go West in summer-time as a waiter — to California. Well, that young man came to my aunt's butler and he said to him, 'Perks, will you teach me all you know about your business?' And Perks did. When the occasion arose, that good Perks waited on that young man at my aunt's table with the same respect he had always shown him, knowing that the next day he would be showing him how to do to others as he had been done the night before by Perks. Could your Tony do that?"

I shook my head. "But," I asked, "does Vanda make a secret of her father's origin?"

"Origin?" said Virginia; "it's just that he has n't got. His wife died, see, Mrs. Jerrold, when Vanda was so high!"

Virginia indicated with her forefinger the spot on the fender up to which Vanda would have reached had she been there at that age. It was exactly four inches from the ground.

"Just about so high. He did n't know what to do, so he set to educate his child until she was far above him." Virginia pointed ceilingwards. "She never saw her father till she was educated out of all proportion to her size and to his standing. She went to Brussels, to Paris, to Leipzig. At ten years old she got her clothes in Vienna and her waists in Paris. Then it appears people began asking where the money came from. And people put such a construction on things generally that the father thought it was better to present himself, even as he was, than that things should go on as they were. Then came the difficulty. Instead of Vanda going straight to her papa and throwing her arms round

his neck, thankful to have found him, she shuddered and said she should never recover from the disgrace. It was better to have no father than a tradesman for a father! Why, I have seen the sweetest old men in shops since I came over to Europe. I've wanted to hug them because they have reminded me so of my papa. But Vanda can't see it that way."

I asked what Vanda's father was, more interested in the beautiful reality of Virginia in her blue kimona than in the very unreal father of Vanda.

"Well," said Virginia, "he's just the sweetest, dearest, old man and he sells what people buy; there's nothing in that to make Tony ashamed. He should be proud! Think of the number of fathers who only try to sell what no one will buy. I've seen that in England over and over again, even in the short time I've been here."

I asked Virginia if Vanda had told her all this and she said I was just too 'cute for words.

"It's nice of Tony not to marry the girl for her money," I said.

Then it struck me suddenly, what might have dawned upon me long before, that Tony had shown, so far as I could see, very little desire to marry Vanda; in fact, he had n't had time to do more than talk to Virginia, presumably about Vanda.

Another thing most puzzling was, what had Vanda done with her education? She seemed, if anything, stupid. I asked Virginia, and she said a woman in love must n't be judged.

"Say, Mrs. Jerrold," she said, "you're just dead with sleep. You won't be lonely now?"

I looked at the clock; there were so few hours left before breakfast that I should manage to sleep those away. I opened the window wide to the dawn, and Virginia said softly, "How near God comes sometimes." Then without saying a word she slipped away, and as I got into bed I thought how understanding Virginia was. She had understood Vanda, had discovered her sorrow; had understood Tony, and had understood me enough to know that I was too unhappy to sleep, and had come to spend the night with me without my ever discovering it until the night was well past. I had understood no one, and so I slept.

XXIX

WILL *all* the ladies be in to luncheon, ma'am," said Ashbee, the following morning.

I said I could n't find any of the ladies, which was quite true. They had all disappeared as mysteriously as they had come. I went up to Virginia's room. I knocked at the door. "Come in," she cried, and in I went. She was sitting at her writing-table, her cheeks flushed. Strewn around her were sheets of closely written manuscript. She looked up.

"I can't make up my mind," she said, "what to make Vanda's father; the English don't mind anything now"; then pulling herself together, she said, "I must have been dreaming, Mrs. Jerrold; do you want anything? Do you want me, I should love to come."

"No, no," I said, closing the door gently. Outside it for a few minutes I stood; then I said, under my breath, "I can't make up my mind what to make — Vanda's — father — make?"

Upstairs I went and knocked at Vanda's door. "Come in," said a voice. I went in. Vanda was writing. With a gasp she shut up her book and sat on it. It was a manuscript book, lined. I knew the kind; American cloth cover, ninepence.

"Are you writing, too?" I asked.

"Just a little; I thought Virginia and Mr. Austin would make a good subject for a story; just a short

story. I've got a month to do it in and no restrictions. But it is so quiet here. But I'm quite ready to go out if you want me!"

"I won't disturb you," I said.

"A month to do it in," I murmured, as I walked to Cordelia's door.

I knocked. "Come in," she said.

"Are you writing, too?" I asked.

"Yes, dear understanding thing! I've got lots of copy. I had to drown one old man and a child; not to do it, with a sea handy, would have seemed such waste. I have discovered all about Vanda."

"What's her father?" I said sternly.

"She has n't got one. Listen!"

"No!" I said gently but firmly, and I shut the door.

I went to find Biddy Benson. She was not in her room; in that she was singular. I walked to the window and looked out. Down on the rocks below she was sitting very nearly hand in hand with Tony. Her eyelashes shaded her eyes and there was more than the blush of sunburn on her cheeks. Her little brown, brogued shoes were stuck out well in front of her and her blue stockings went with her tie, and matched her eyes and Tony's eyes as well, and so deeply were they engaged in conversation that I could only imagine they were discussing Vanda's father. I wished I knew where Christopher was, so that I might wire to him to deliver me from these writers. I felt unsafe among so many. By next spring the newspapers would be full of advertisements of books about us: —

"Father to the Thought,"
by Vanda Summer.
"Stranger than Truth,"
by Virginia.
"An Apple-Pudding: A Poem in Prose,"
by Cordelia Trant.

After that I could make no attempt to describe our castle by the sea. It will be fully described elsewhere. What we ate, what we drank, what we did, what we said, what we thought!

When Virginia told me the next day that she had heard from the duchess, I did n't know whether she had or not; whether or not there was a duchess! When Vanda told me her father had sprained his tendon achilles and wanted her home, I did n't know whether he had one or not.

The only real thing about Virginia was the intensity of the hug she gave me on parting. That was the real genuine thing, and that she loved me as much as a really affectionate woman can love another in three days I believe, and that that much can be a good deal I knew, by the affection I felt for her.

Vanda went to her father; Virginia to her duchess. Only Tony, Biddy, and Cordelia remained.

"*All* the ladies going to-day, ma'am?" said Ashbee. And I, knowing that Miss Strange and Miss Summer summed up *all*, said, "Yes, Ashbee." And he straightway went about his business. What that was I did n't guess until, out on the rocks, in the dusk of the evening, looking out to sea, I sat, and felt the inexpressible joy and comfort of a pair of strong arms round me.

"Darling, darling, darling, will you ever forgive me, leaving you like that?"

And somehow or other forgiveness came with a rush and the distant manner I had determined to adopt when Christopher came back was not to be found. And looking up to the windows of the castle to make sure that Cordelia was not getting this copy, I looked up at Christopher and I was quite glad he had gone away.

"Where did you go?" I whispered.

"To Inverness, to have my hair cut, darling."

"Did Ashbee know?" I whispered.

"Yes, he knew. He telegraphed to me three times a day. I've just raised him ten pounds a year."

"What had he to say in the telegrams?"

"Well, let me see; the last one yesterday was, 'Collecting wraps prior to starting packing.' The first one this morning was, 'Packing well on.' The second was, 'Gone.'"

I said I did n't believe it.

"Will you believe how I have missed you ? Oh, Priscilla, I can't live without you! It's too absurd."

I told him he had missed Virginia and she was so lovely.

"Tell me about her."

"How dark it is!" I said.

"The moon's an old sportsman; go on."

I told him all there was to tell about Virginia. He asked if I really thought she was an American.

"Oh, Christopher, must n't she have been?" I said, "with all those trunks and a black chauffeur?"

He said she would dress the part, of course. He rather wished he had come back yesterday. That idiot of an

Ashbee might have used his own judgment. I said I thought he had.

"Don't you wish," I said, "you had never gone?"

"No, I don't wish that now."

"Christopher!"

"Um?"

"Who could have imagined such extraordinary things could come from just putting a little advertisement in the paper?"

"But such an advertisement! Only a Priscilla could do it. And there is only one Priscilla in the world and can ever be!"

"If you could have seen her bathing in the moonlight — Virginia, I mean!"

"Could I have looked?"

"Oh, yes, perfectly," I said. "Must we go in?"

XXX

I HAD, of course, meant to write of sunsets and waves and scones and of Scotland. Of the old woman at the post-office, whom I loved. Of the stone-breaker I loved. I might have described shooting over dogs; for a change, sitting in butts. I might have written volumes on the fish we lost — they are always worth writing about — if size goes for anything; of the golf we played; of the ruined castles we explored; of the shells we picked up; but of what avail when there may be three books describing exactly the same things.

There is nothing mysterious about Biddy's father. He is master of the Buttershaw hounds and is noted for his hard riding as much as for his hard swearing; as much for his ready tongue as for his ready money. There is nothing secret about him. He says just what he thinks as loud as he can. What he will say when Tony asks for Biddy, I don't know.

In the meantime there was nothing to prevent Tony writing a poem to Biddy's eyelashes. They were very long, and if he waited a little her complexion would be very nearly as fine as Virginia's. She will never dress as Virginia dresses; but a man does n't want that in a wife; so Tony told Christopher. He also said he liked Biddy best in her silk shirt and blue tie, which is just as well, as Biddy will never wear anything else except to church on Sundays.

I wonder if either Virginia or Vanda or Cordelia has got this story? Christopher gave the keeper an old

tweed suit; a few days later Tony met the keeper's small boy, aged four to be exact, in a suit of large checks.

"Where did you get your smart clothes, sonny?" said Tony.

"Oot of Jerrold's old breeks," said the small boy.

Christopher loved that.

In the course of a few days I received a letter from Virginia. Under the ducal coronet she wrote the date in her large, fluent, and extremely legible handwriting:

I can see you standing, dearest Mrs. Jerrold, in that delicious old doorway, and waving to me as I drove away. If I had had my way and that lovely man of yours would have come back with me there, I should just have jumped out and come back and stayed with you just so long as you would have had me. But you were fretting, that I could see! You're just too lovely! There's an artist staying here — such an interesting young man — and I've been telling him about you and he's going straight away from here to paint you! He says he's never seen colouring just as I describe yours. Mr. Jerrold won't fly from a solitary young man as he does from a flock of women, or you might as well be a widow straightaway! Now, Mrs. Jerrold, you must be longing to hear many things. We behaved very badly to you! But my name is Virginia Strange and my trunks are my own. My papa made his pile in ——? and is none the worse for that. I'm his only daughter and am the better for that, in many ways. I want to make a literary career for myself. So, seeing your advertisement, I came right along to get the hang of Scottish customs — and you did n't play fair there,

dear Mrs. Jerrold! I might have compromised myself in my literary career at the very beginning. It was just too lovely for words with you; but where were the bagpipes prancing around the castle in the early morning? That adorable and stately Ashbee's kilt? The pipers around the dinner-table? It's too Scottish here for words and the duchess looks as serious as a house when they lay the programme before her, so that she may know when they play a dirge and when a lament. She says she knows without the card; but she's not old enough for that! She passes the card along to me and it's all I can do not to laugh. But I would n't do that for worlds. The eldest son, Lord Trebledourie, is too sweet for words and so anxious I should be Scottish. We are studying the customs together and he is coming to America and I am going to teach him some of ours, some which are worth learning. The first will be that American young women don't marry young lords just for the fun of the thing. They've got to get something in exchange, more than a title. He's told me all he's got and he expects me to "tell back," as the children say, and I won't!

Vanda Summer looked so sad because she can't begin her book. She's written the end and the second and third chapters; but the publishers say there must be a beginning, or else it won't "go." Which seems unreasonable, does n't it? You are her heroine and you won't fall in love because you are married! It's only right of course, as you *are* married. But she says, in a book, you would be too dull for words — you would n't "go" one bit! Won't you just alter that expression of yours and look a little wicked to help poor Vanda? She

must write, she says, because she was four-and-twenty last birthday and *must* do something. Two more sisters to come and they are bigger than she is and can't wear her frocks. Good-bye, dear Mrs. Jerrold, I shall never forget your castle and if ever I marry — which I shall have to tell Trebledourie I have no intention of doing in *this* world! — I shall call my daughter Priscilla Virginia Strange ——?

Your devoted just plain and simple Virginia, with nothing Strange about her.

P.S. The duchess is calling me to tell Trebledourie anecdotes. This duchess, by the way, is n't the one my grandfather showed around in America at all. I suppose I made a mistake in the name. Hers is the oldest inhabited castle in Scotland though, but it's let! Is n't that too bad, Mrs. Jerrold, and to an American? So I could have got there easily. Lord Trebledourie told me a duke's eldest son can't be more than a marquis. I tell him that's where he's wrong. I tell him he can be a fine, honest, upright gentleman — which just describes Trebledourie. I don't tell him that! Too many women are always doing that! And he's tired to death of saying it's nonsense; so he just leaves it as it is and smiles.

XXXI

AND now," said Christopher, handing me back Virginia's letter, "we will have some proper visitors."

I put it gently to him that our visitors, although from his point of view unwelcome, had been very proper visitors.

"Hammond is coming," he said.

Mr. Peter Hammond came and I think I was of some help to him. He said I was and when he said it he looked as if he really meant it. I drew him out. On a Sunday afternoon, in fact, the very day before he left, we sat on the sands and he told me of the difficulties into which various of his friends had drifted. Of one in particular about whom he felt very anxious. This friend, it appeared, had for some years been very fond of a woman and now discovered that he did n't feel for her what she felt for him. Mr. Hammond asked me, as a woman of the world, to tell him what his friend could do. I felt as sorry for the friend as Mr. Hammond evidently felt. He expressed his sympathy so kindly, so gently, so nicely. My attention was divided between his sorrow, his friend's sorrow, and the sorrow of a poor gull who appeared to have a broken wing and was being carried out to sea. I wondered if it felt jealous of the other gulls who were sailing in the air and swooping down on to the water.

Mr. Hammond stopped speaking. "Yes?" I said sympathetically.

"You're not listening," he said sadly.

I said I was very deeply interested; but to excuse myself I pointed to the ruined castle in the distance, mysterious and shadowy, outlined vaguely against the opalescent sky, across whose loveliness winged soft white fleecy clouds. "Is n't it lovely?" I said.

"Lovely! it's difficult to believe the world is such a rotten place. This spoils one for everything else," he said.

"But it is n't. It's a lovely place," I said, protesting; then remembering the poor woman, I added, "Your friend no longer cares for the girl?"

"Well, in a sense. Of course, he feels —"

"But he does n't care in the right way," I suggested.

That was it.

I said if he did n't care for her in the right way it would be cruel to marry her. She would be grateful to him some day for telling her so, before it was too late.

He asked if I thought a woman could ever be thankful to a man who told her he did n't care for her? And I said it was certainly the kindest thing he could do.

"You really think so?" he said, burying his fingers in the soft sand.

I said I was sure of it. If Christopher had found he did n't, after all, care for me I should rather he —

Mr. Hammond laughed, which jarred. We were having a very serious talk. I was feeling very sorry for his friend. Then it flashed upon me — of course, the friend was Mr. Hammond himself! Here was my chance to help him. I asked if she were well off, and he said, What had that to do with it? He asked the

question abruptly, letting the sand pour through his fingers. It was fascinating to watch.

"Well," I said, "you say your friend has been fond of her for a good many years; that means she is probably not very young now, and if she has n't much money it would be leaving her — I mean if you broke off the engagement — rather as that gull is left, would n't it?"

"What gull?"

I pointed to the gull drifting.

"But I don't know that the girl's wing is broken — or perhaps her heart, I should say; the question is, should a man marry from a feeling of pity?"

"Not if you feel you can't really love her," I said.

"You think I should pretend to love her?" he asked.

"We were not talking about you," I said.

"So I thought; but just now you said 'you' in speaking of him. What makes you so understanding? Are there tears in your eyes?"

I said I was sorry for the gull. That I hated to see anything suffer. Mr. Hammond said it had had its day. There was nothing so cruel as nature. That gull, left to nature, would starve.

"What a shame it is to make you unhappy," he exclaimed. "The man who does that should be shot! . . . D' you know the first time I saw you I thought you were the happiest thing I had ever seen! Do you remember the day we met?"

I did n't remember in the least; but feeling it would be showing a want of sympathy to say so, I said I thought I remembered it vaguely.

"You do?" he said eagerly.

I wished now I had spoken the truth. Mr. Hammond for some reason looked unnecessarily pleased. I had n't meant to give him so much pleasure; I only had wanted not to hurt his feelings.

It is very difficult to be sympathetic and not sympathise too much. I wonder how other people manage!

"So my friend marries the girl, you think," said Mr. Hammond, looking sadly out to sea.

The white clouds had passed, leaving the sky a soft blue shot with gold and amethyst.

"No," I said; "it would be the kindest thing to tell her he no longer cares, in *that* way."

"In what way?" he asked, looking at me.

I said, In the way one must love to be happy.

He said, would I tell him what that way was? So that he might tell his friend who was as much at sea as that poor gull, and drifting just as it was drifting.

I said I could n't describe what I meant; but I felt the perfect marriage was that where love was perfect trust, confidence, and forgiveness.

He said that was, in theory, delightful; but in practice! Take my own case. Trust? It was quite easy to say trust. What, as a matter of fact, had Richard ever done that I could do anything but trust him? So that did away with trust. Confidence? I knew exactly what Richard was, therefore, to have confidence in him did not need any particular goodness on my part. Again, forgiveness? Was it likely Richard would ever do anything I could n't forgive? Forget to post a letter? Order the motor? Pay my dressmaker? Of course I could forgive him!

"You see, my dear Mrs. Jerrold, you beautiful young

married women with charming and devoted husbands build these lovely castles in the air, castles whose foundations rest on an entirely imaginary basis. Everything is imaginary except the happiness itself, and that is yours by reason of your being what you are. Your goodness, your sweetness, which are all inherent qualities! You imagine you possess them. You don't; they possess you. You can't get rid of them. You have been brought up to believe you can forgive anything. It is only a few women who have that power; the generosity to understand people less good and happy than themselves. It is they who count in this world. Look at Lady Danby! What a good woman she is! One of the best and so beautiful. You heard how she got poor old Mercer through his trouble?"

"Mercer!" I said, shrinking from the connection of the two names.

"Yes, it's no secret now, half London knows it. It was all through Lady Danby it came right. When his wife threatened to go off the lines, Mercer pretty nearly went off his head. Lady Danby had more influence with the girl than anyone, and she saw it was a fit of temporary madness. Mercer said Lady Danby was wonderful. She had the girl down to Lonedene for a few days and did all she could to influence her. The girl went back to London and broke all the promises she had made. Mercer told me he fetched Lady Danby one afternoon and she came straight back with him from Lonedene, went to the theatre and saw the girl and persuaded her to go home. The girl was n't anything of an actress. She was carried away by the flattery of a scoundrel who saw Mercer's money in the

business and laughed at her behind her back. Mercer married her secretly — that's when he made the first mistake. It is women like you and Lady Danby, with adoring husbands and devoted friends and sound heads, who so often don't feel for these other women who are impressionable, unbalanced, irresponsible —"

I said I did feel for them.

"Yes, I am sure you do. There is something in your face that spells hope for the rest of the world."

I was very glad to see Christopher, who at that moment joined us.

"What has Peter been saying; working on your feelings?" he said, sitting down beside me. "My wife is the universal sympathiser; is n't that it, Priscilla?"

Christopher laughed and Mr. Hammond said he must go in and see about putting his things together.

"Was I right?" asked Christopher as we watched Mr. Hammond walk away. "Was I right?" he repeated.

I nodded.

At that moment the gull I thought had a broken wing rose from the water and flew away.

"It is n't broken, after all," I said.

"What, Peter's heart? Don't you worry about that. He has n't got one, in the accepted sense of the word. And the heart of his poor stock friend who does n't know whether he should marry the girl or not must be worn out from constant use, and the poor woman must have more than one foot in the grave. Am I right there, too?" he asked, and I nodded again.

I told Christopher it was very difficult to be sympathetic and not too sympathetic. "Is n't it?"

"My darling," he said, "I wish I could make you

see that! You would be saved an immense amount of trouble and I should be spared a great deal of anxiety. You can't, perhaps, imagine what I feel directly there appears on the social horizon a half-starved-looking, miserable *poseur* of a poet, or musician, or anything else you like to call him, who wishes to appeal to the sympathy he does n't in the least deserve. I see your eyes getting bigger and bigger and I know your heart is undergoing exactly the same process, and all that is good and generous and imprudent in your nature is fighting for the soul of that really very happy, elated, and prosperous pretender. In London no one knows what I suffered! You have been given, in me, a legitimate outlet! Be as sorry for me as you can; I will do anything, within reason, to deserve that sympathy. When you feel that overpowering pity, for someone, coming upon you, take the train up to London; the hands of the children, countless children, are held out to you. Go to the hospitals, go to the homes of the really poor and see what sympathy can do. But don't expend it on the Buttercups and Hammonds of this world, who never demand the sympathy or understanding of any woman who is n't in some way or other attractive — to others as well as to themselves. Wait until you are fifty-five and then, if young men come to you for sympathy, give it to them with both hands. Unfortunately there is something curiously provocative about that funny little face of yours; I wish you had more outlets. But there are plenty outside the world of well-to-do bachelors. I am with you in your baby scheme; I got the plans yesterday for your absurd palace of peace, or whatever you like to call it."

I told him he was a darling. He said I had said so before.

"But this is business," he continued. "What would you think if someone less kind than the people who love you best said your sympathy with young men was a form of flirtation?"

I said, indignantly, that it would be perfectly infamous; then, realizing that these problematic people might be women, and anxious to show I was ready and only waiting to understand them, I cooled down and said sadly, "No doubt they would have good cause for thinking so; some grounds for misunderstanding my motives."

"Good Priscilla; by the way, here is a letter for you; Miller fetched the post."

The letter was from Africa, from Lord Danby. I opened it. Christopher said nothing; he lay on the sands and looked out to the sea. I read the letter.

Dear — may I call you Priscilla? I think so! Daphne would laugh at me for calling you anything else. Christopher, I know, would say, Yes. Well, first of all, write me down an ass! I have had a letter from your aunt — she signs herself — to me — "your Aunt Jolly," which made me cry; one can't stand that kind of thing out in the wilds! She tells me you are worrying that dear little head of yours and that I am the cause. If you had seen your face that night, with your eyes twice too big for its size, you would have realised what a man — who, after all, is only a man — would have felt. Was it of Talleyrand it was said, he had two brains, one where his heart ought to have been? I for-

get! My heart must have given a bound and got mixed up with my brain and stopped that slow-going machine altogether. I was miserable. Daphne had been crying her eyes out about the Mercer business. Mercer had been working on my feelings and had persuaded me to let Daphne go up to town with him to see what she could do — she's so understanding! Well, I'm no good at explanations. Let's forget all about this. Of course I know you adore Richard. You asked, I remember, if my love for Daphne was big enough; Heaven knows it's big enough for anything. Even for forgiving her if she had thought of running away, which, thank God, she never did. I have found out I can't live without her — elephant hunting is poor sport when your heart is not in it. I telegraphed to Daphne to know if I should come home. Her answer has made Heaven of this world. Tell Christopher Richard the whole story. Let there be no secrets! Tell him as soon as you get this. I can hear him say, "Danby's an ass," and it won't be the first time; it became an incorrigible habit at Eton.

Yours ever,

D.

I handed the letter to Christopher.

When I saw he had finished it I said, "That was what made me thin and miserable and restless . . . I went to see if I could help and comfort. . . ."

Christopher nodded. He said nothing. He tore the letter into small pieces, dug a hole in the sand and put the pieces of paper into it. Then he struck a match and, fostering the flame in the hollow of his hand, waited in silence for it to burn up. When it burned

steadily he set light to the pieces of paper. They caught fire and burned invisibly in the bright light. When nothing but little grey feathery bits remained, he covered those bits, that did n't blow away, with sand. Then to mark the spot he stuck, in the top of the little mound, a gull's feather, a tiny feather that bent to the breeze.

I wished he would speak. When at last he spoke, he said, very gently, "You can't, my prudent Priscilla, put out the fire sympathy lights as easily as we have put that out." Then, looking at me, he said, "You don't understand me yet, darling! What hurts me most is that you should have kept this from me. I thought the happiest thing in our happy married life was that we were such — chums . . . that you looked upon me as your best friend . . . I imagined, except for absurd little secrets that Cordelia makes by the dozen, you had none from me — and all this time you have had this one! Such a secret as the Mercers' was not one I cared for you to know — I hate you to be mixed up with such things. Have you any other secrets? If you have, now would be the time to tell me, I think! Tell me, Priscilla!"

There was a pause. "I would rather know," he persisted gently.

"Only one," I said, "that concerns you and me." I hated to have my poor little secret laid bare. "I think it is the kind of secret every woman has."

"Tell me. There is nothing I would n't forgive you . . . my most prudent Priscilla. You know that?"

"It is only my dream children," I said.

He did n't laugh; that I should have thought he might, perhaps, shows how little I understood him. He was silent for a few seconds, then he said, "Dream children? Have you dream children, Priscilla?" He held out his hand and I took it. There was something wonderfully tender and gentle in the firmness of his grip.

"Don't you, Christopher?" I said, gaining courage. "Have you never taught tiny, eager, brown hands to put on flies? Have you never, in your dreams, bowled lobs to an absurd thing no higher than the stump he so valiantly defends? Have you never put the foot of a tiny Priscilla into a ridiculous little stirrup?"

"Have mercy, Priscilla, it's not playing the game," said Christopher, laughing; but there were tears in his heart, I know, and I looked away so that he should not see the tears in my eyes. And in silence we sat.

"There's going to be a glorious sunset," I said.

"Come," he said, "let's look!"

Climbing over the sand dunes, we looked to the west, where low on the horizon, lay dark, grey clouds; above them, rising triumphantly, were more clouds, changing as we looked from gold to pink, from pink to amethyst, from amethyst to purple; then with a rush into the vast canopy, rose-colour everywhere. From east to west, from north to south, rose-colour. The sea rose-colour, the sands, the sky, the whole world. The wet sands were mirrors in which was reflected the glory of the heavens. I looked at Christopher; his face glowed in the light; in his eyes was reflected the glory of my world.

Then turning to me he said, "Did you remember

about the lobsters?" and the glory slowly faded from the sky, the sea, the — no, not from the world.

"Oh, Christopher!" I said: then remembering he had just said how little I understood him I made a supreme effort. From rose to scarlet, after all, was but a mental step. "But they are n't naturally red, poor darlings."

Then Christopher, putting his arm through mine, said, "When, at last, you convince me, Priscilla, that the world is a rose-coloured world, you talk of lobsters!"

"Yes," I said, drawing a deep breath, "it was dreadful of me! Is n't it glorious?"

And it was.

XXXII

SO back to Dell we went. Our journey south was without adventure. I received the confidences of two men only. The one was unhappily married and the other unhappy because he was n't married. I gave sandwiches to both and parted with the least unhappy one at Aviemore. The other I sent along to a smoking-carriage, telling him that there he would find a very tall young man who would give him the very best advice on all subjects. But that he must not be disappointed if the advice on the question of an unhappy married life was unpractical, because it had not come within the tall young man's own experience.

"It's not so much I am unhappy," said the young man, "as that I feel a want of understanding."

I said that the tall young man in the smoking-compartment had suffered, perhaps, rather from the opposite extreme.

I then applied myself with determination to my novel and the man went. I was glad I had been of some use to someone, but I wished it could have been to a woman. But those women who came my way either found my face unsympathetic or they had nothing to confide.

Christopher does not invite strangers either to his confidence or to his compartment, when we are travelling.

He is one of those men whose intrusion into a railway carriage is never resented by those already in oc-

cupation, which says much for his kind of looks. I creep in with the rugs and bags under the shadow of his disarming personality.

It was a lovely autumn day when we arrived at Dell. Best said it was prettier than Scotland, and the people more human. I said it was not so wild, and Best said it was none the worse for that. There were things she liked wild — flowers, for instance; but not people nor bulls. She had met both in Scotland.

Some months later Lord Danby came back from Africa, and we met with perhaps a little restraint. But I did n't suffer any real embarrassment until, in looking at his "heads," I mistook the head of a hippopotamus for that of a rhinoceros. He hastened to assure me that the resemblance was remarkable; but of course the great difference was that the "rhino" had a horn. Not much of a thing after all, but a distinction. His explanation and my stupidity helped us over a difficult time and when he emerged from the maze of natural history, he was quite natural and so was I. Daphne stood by with a smile on her lips and mischief dancing in her eyes. Lord Danby, brown, looked better than he had ever looked and he seemed to have gained something more than sunburn in his absence. He drew me aside and told me that in the lonely parts, away from everyone and civilization, things in life took on their proper proportion; the big things stood out big, and the little things dwindled to nothing — became nothing in the presence of God and Nature! And I, feeling my eyes growing larger and larger, remembered just in time that I was getting into deep waters, and, screwing up my eyes and shutting my heart, I laughed! And the

soul of Lord Danby, which had begun to grow so beautifully in the African soil, received its first nip from the coldness of my unsympathetic manner. Which was to me a very real grief, but I owed it to Christopher to do what I could to be unsympathetic at the first opportunity.

"Why did you snub poor Danby?" Daphne asked. "I shall really have to run away if you won't be kind to him."

"Don't!" I pleaded.

"You are a most quaint woman," said Daphne. And I think she was right.

In the early spring a letter came from Anne. It was a letter as curt as Anne's speech is abrupt.

Please come, Miss Priscilla, if Mr. Jerrold can spare you. I don't like the look of your aunt.

Your humble and obedient,

ANNE.

Now I knew that Anne was neither the one nor the other, but that she would expect of me one at least of those qualities I knew, so for that and other more natural reasons I went. At the door I was met by Anne. She wore her black silk apron, which I knew at that hour in the morning meant that something of an unusual nature was going on.

Aunt Jolly was in bed. Softly I tiptoed upstairs.

"You have no need to do that," said Anne, stumping up behind me. "She's not so bad as that. And if she hears you making no noise, it'll scare her. It's haveringness more than anything."

More boldly I walked down the passage. Gently I turned the handle of the door. "Aunt Jolly!" I said.

"Priscilla, I knew you would come; the dear, good Richard!"

"Why, of course!" I said.

As I passed the dressing-table I saw on the pin-cushion the "Cheer-up" brooch. It brought back a rush of tender memories, and I knelt beside the bed and putting my arms round Aunt Jolly said, "What's the matter?"

Aunt Jolly by raising her eyebrows expressed a desire to be alone with me.

"Anne," I said, "I wonder if I could have a glass of hot milk?"

Anne put out her hand and with calm deliberation rang the bell. Then, taking up her position on the hearthrug, waited to see and to hear what I might have to say to my aunt and she to me.

Aunt Jolly winked at me, which showed she was not so ill as I had feared. In silence we sat. Every now and then I said something and Aunt Jolly agreed with me.

"Tell me about Scotland — more than you have already told me," she said.

I told her what I had already told her months before.

Suddenly Anne said, "Can't you cheer your aunt up a bit, Miss Priscilla? Surely you've got something to tell her?"

I blushed, and Aunt Jolly, seeing the blush, framed with tremulous lips the word, "Danby?"

I bent my head and kissed the hand that lay on the counterpane.

"I'll go, then," said Anne, "since it appears that I'm the construction. There was a time when it was Anne here and Anne there!"

"What is it, Aunt Jolly?" I said as Anne closed the door.

Aunt Jolly looked round to make sure we were alone; then, drawing me closer to her with trembling hands, she whispered, "I can't bear to tell you!"

Her voice broke and her lips began to work piteously. There is nothing more pathetic than to see an old person struggling with tears.

"Don't, don't, darling Aunt Jolly!" I said. "Please, tell me!"

"That mine — you remember?"

I said I remembered. "Is it money, Aunt Jolly? Money is always lost in mines, if it is lost. There's nothing to worry about in that. Christopher —"

"Yes, but the money belonged to you children."

"No, to you absolutely."

"But it was a sacred trust!"

I asked her exactly how much it was?

"The capital?" she whispered.

And I, knowing how terrifying a word "capital" is, said, "No, the income you lose, how much?"

"One hundred —"

I said that was nothing. "You must remember I have three hundred a year of my own, darling Aunt Jolly. It shall be yours!"

"My tender Priscilla," she said, crying softly, "if ever I have done anything for you, you have repaid it ten thousand times; not now, but always. There is something I have sometimes longed to tell you and

have not dared. You would be distressed to find me less good than you had thought? I have entertained feelings that no modest woman would have suffered herself to feel. At times they have oppressed me by their unnaturalness. At other times I have tried to excuse them to myself as being natural, and have tried to persuade myself that God would not send me feelings that I ought not to have. He has given us love."

"What kind of feeling, darling?" I asked.

"Just that feeling that you, Priscilla, were my own child. I used, when you were a baby, to imagine you were mine. Your mother was often amused at the time I spent nursing you in the garden. For those hours you *were* mine! You were so tiny. Sometimes you slept with me! I could have enjoyed a deep feeling for you, as an aunt, but the temptation to feel something more was too great. Sometimes, afterwards, when you became mine, it haunted me that, perhaps without knowing it, I might have framed a prayer that you might really become mine. And when your mother died —"

"My darling Aunt Jolly, what an idea! Imagine what it must be to mother to know how much you love us!"

"You know the worst of your old aunt now! Do you understand? I think perhaps you will!"

The door opened and Anne came in. I walked to the window and stood looking out on to a world full of hope and promise.

Anne stood looking at me. Then she said, "Have you told your aunt?" and I shook my head.

Anne, walking up to me, said sharply, "Best knows?"

I shook my head.

"It is I, Anne," said Aunt Jolly, holding out a fragile little hand to me, "who have been telling Miss Priscilla things."

I took her hand, and Anne said, "Humph!" and left the room.

"You can't conceive, my child," said Aunt Jolly, "what I have suffered as I have lain here. The thought of that money robbed me of my strength. Now I am strong. See!"

She rose on her pillows and showed by the pressure of her arms round me how strong she felt.

"Priscilla," she said, "my child —"

"Darling Aunt Jolly, what you told me just now you told me at the right time. A little time ago I might not so well have understood."

"And Richard?" breathed Aunt Jolly.

"He does n't know, that's why *you* don't."

"Of course I don't, my child, my child!"

When I left Aunt Jolly, she was sleeping calmly and happily. The weight of a secret burden removed, the burden of another secret lay lightly hidden in her heart of hearts, and as she slept she smiled.

XXXIII

ANNE had guessed what Best knew, and what by rights Christopher alone should have known. One evening I found Best in the nursery, pulling up the blinds.

"Best?" I said.

With her hand still on a blind, directing its course, she turned to me and all the sourness left her face. The lines of discontent vanished as if — as if — the hand of a little child had smoothed them away.

"You don't know, Best," I said. "Mr. Jerrold must be the first."

"My lamb, ma'am, my lamb," cried silly old Best, letting the blind go up with a rush and a bang. "I don't know — I don't know anything — but this I *do* know; I can face the village now. I can pour out tea at the mothers' meetings without turning a hair! Have you sometimes thought me cross?" she asked the question a little wistfully.

"Perhaps, at times, a little," I said.

"My lamb, I could n't bear things said against you! The child I had brought up!"

"Could any one have been so unkind?" I asked, walking to the window and trying to pull down the blind.

"You can't get it down again," said Best; "pulling only makes it worse. It's up for good and all now, thank God!"

"You know nothing, Best!" I reiterated.

"Nothing," said Best, strangely acquiescent and docile.

Then it was I heard Christopher's whistle, and Best, going as red and white as a Dutch doll, left the room, and I, answering, called, "Here I am!"

"Where?"

"Up here!"

Up he came and I listened. I heard him stop at the door of my bedroom, on the floor below.

"Here!" I called, then waited.

"What are you doing?" he asked, coming up the flight of stairs, not two steps at a time as is his habit, but slowly as if he wondered where he was going. Down the passage he came.

"Here!" I called, feigning an impatience to account for the absurd beating of my heart.

"Here?" he said, with that in his voice that for the moment stopped the beating of my heart. Gently he pushed open the door. Gently he closed it, and coming through the radiance of that sunlit room, he joined me at the window.

Leaning out, I drew him with me and together we looked into the golden evening — over the green lawns, away to the horizon, all golden and glorious.

In like manner, with the woman he loved, may his grandfather have looked, his father have looked, and, please God! his son shall some day look. And if the son, like his father before him, shall prove but a medium chooser of women, may she he chooses be as happy as this woman is, who shall some day welcome her with open arms.

In silence we stood, feeling no need for words; until, womanlike, I whispered, "Say you are pleased!" And he said he was pleased; but just how he said it I would not tell if I could. Because there are no spoken words so sacred as those unspoken words which many a wife has heard from the heart of her husband; and yet there is in those unspoken words that which comes afresh to every happy woman and therein lies her happiness. She learns then that there is a language without speech; a poem without words; a prayer without form, and a thanksgiving without end.

THE END

The Riverside Press
CAMBRIDGE . MASSACHUSETTS
U . S . A

PEOPLE OF POPHAM

By MARY C. E. WEMYSS

"As vivid in its way as 'Cranford.'" — *Boston Transcript.*

"One of the most charming chronicles of village life ever written." — *Living Age.*

"Such a book as this may be read aloud evening after evening, with recurrent zest, with enjoyment of its humor, its quaint and human personages as they take their unhurried way through agreeable pages." — *Louisville Courier Journal.*

"A book which will give many readers a rare pleasure." — *Chicago Evening Post.*

"A sort of modern 'Cranford,' good to read all the way through." — *Minneapolis Journal.*

Illustrated. $1.20 *net.* Postage 11 cents.

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY

BOSTON AND NEW YORK

THE PROFESSIONAL AUNT

By MARY C. E. WEMYSS

"One of the most delightful stories that has ever crossed the water." — *Louisville Courier-Journal.*

"The legitimate successor of 'Helen's Babies.'"
Clara Louise Burnham.

"A classic in the literature of childhood."
San Francisco Chronicle.

"Mrs. Wemyss is a formidable rival to E. Nesbit, who hitherto has stood practically alone as a charmingly humorous interpreter of child life."
Chicago Inter-Ocean.

"A charming, witty, tender book."
Kate Douglas Wiggin.

"It is a sunny, warm-hearted humorous story, that leaves the reader with a sense of time well spent in its perusal." — *Brooklyn Eagle.*

16mo. $1.00 *net.* Postage 10 cents.

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY

BOSTON AND NEW YORK

BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY
3 9999 10030 016 7